

ROCKIN' THE MIC: PREACHING FROM THE HIP HOP IMAGINATION

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ABSTRACT

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This project seeks to produce a sermon methodology of preparation that will ultimately lead to preaching that will impact youth and young adult listeners to engage in Christian discipleship by utilizing methods informed by the Hip Hop Imagination. The methodology of research will include listening sessions to four sermons from two different forms and styles. Phenomenology will be sought by the listeners in terms of how they react, feel and experience transformation from each sermon method. The results from the qualitative research proved that utilizing the Hip Hop Imagination can tremendously impact younger listeners to Discipleship.

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I also acknowledge my cohort with whom I shared this journey especially my writing partner I wish to acknowledge my Faculty Mentors, the Reverends Dr. William Curtis and Gina Stewart whose patience, leadership, guidance and superior level of excellence in the homiletic arts have been a great source of inspiration. They will never know their enormous impact on my life.

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DEDICATION

To my mother, Emma Francine Green, the one who taught me that the struggle continues
And who invested in every dream I could imagine.

To my Grandmother, who made me think I was the only person in the world and who
dedicated her life to my good and to my advantage.

I miss you both, yet I know that your eyes have been all over this document
Even from that place where there is no space and time.

Introduction

This project is the result of years of intellectual tension between the spaces of academic introductions to preaching while in seminary to following the writer's own path in the Christian frontier. In short, while in seminary the writer learned to preach to people born before 1960 and yet, so much of life has occurred beyond 1960 including the development of new sociological paradigms, sub-cultural emphasis, and socio-political dynamics.

This project attempts to navigate the potential of arriving at a preaching genre referenced as Hip Hop preaching. Preachers who utilize what the writer calls the Hip Hop Imagination will be able to craft, structure and deliver a sermon that will be a connector to young adults throughout urban culture. It is not a requirement to be a Hip Hop fanatic or to have a Hip Hop audience to preach in this way. All one needs is a desire to engage in the ugliness of life without trying to make it too pretty and have a commitment to find God's footprints in the city. It is clear that God cares about the city. Nehemiah was called and was led to go back to the city to rebuild the walls. One of Jesus' instructions to his disciples was to "go back to the city and tarry there until you receive power". This is a project of how to preach in the city in such a way where the listener is compelled to build relationship with God and enter the text as a sojourner and not just a spectator as much of modernist preaching can often create.

Chapter One

In chapter one, an autobiographical journey about the preacher's life growing up in the context of family, school, church and adult life will be made available. Additionally, the writer's current context, Queen's Chapel United Methodist Church's history, challenges, and journey will also be shared. A synergy between the two will be constructed and lead the arrival of how the experiences of family drama, congregational decline, apathy and growing up in the midst of a hectic world of urban life come together to create a sermonic product imagined by the tenets of Hip Hop.

Chapter Two, Three and Four

Chapter two through four is an exploration of the Biblical, historical, and theological focus of the project. The writer makes an attempt to observe how the church has always struggled with change. Hip Hop is a protest against the resistance of change. From a Hip Hop perspective, the resistance to change social dynamics and paradigms is an attempt to control. The postmodern voice is a voice seeking to emerge from its previous sociological paradigms. This means that many historical movements were postmodern. The Civil Rights movements in American History were postmodern as the modernist approaches were to keep the country with systems of slavery, Jim Crow, and segregation. Therefore, chapter three includes a historical analysis of various changes

that have occurred throughout church history. These changes are centered on monasticism, the emergence of Methodism in England and America, and the Black church struggle with adapting to newer music styles throughout its history.

The Biblical foundation explores how the Hip Hop imagination might be experienced in the life of an individual and a community. The character analysis was that of Jacob, his family, his journey and his relationship with God. His life, like much of Hip Hop intersects with a family that includes parents that are not on the same page, a difficult relationship with his brother, a series of bad mistakes, a choice to run away from home, falling in love with a woman and ending up in a series of complicated relationships with the woman and the woman's family, which is also his family.

The Communal Study is that of the story Nicodemus and that of the blind man in the John's gospel. Both of these stories are related because they involve the secret community of Christians. This secret community was one that was too afraid to speak up publically about their belief in Jesus. They were believers on the down low. This cuts to one of the primary call of Hip Hop to stand up and speak up or else one will be "fake". John explores Jesus' treatment of this community with Jesus' call to Nicodemus to change his thinking and become a new person, a new being or to become born again.

The theological component of the project explores a possible systematic theology of Hip Hop/liberationist thought. The theological survey begins with the theological tension between Karl Barth's dialectic theologies alongside Paul Tillich's natural theology and ends up with a consideration of the conversation between the womanist and

feminist voices. From this, the writer was able to find his own voice, which is male, African American, inner-city, and Christian.

Chapter Five

Chapter five states the reality of why such a Hip Hop homiletic product is needed. In chapter two the writer takes a look at Homiletic theory, critiques Modernist preaching, and underlines the need to be more intentional to engage a postmodern sermonic product. To engage in preaching with the Hip Hop imagination is an attempt to add to the expository preacher's method. Preaching in the Hip Hop imagination is expository preaching that has the element of soul, reality, and hope. To do this, it is critical that the preacher remain real, take the text seriously, and dare to go exactly where the text goes even if it is hard, harsh, and unpleasant to typical congregant's ears.

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Chapter Six

The methodology of the project will explore the hypothesis: Preaching to urban young adults can be enhanced by preaching with the Hip Hop imagination that includes reality, tension, and hope.

The project began with engaging in conversation with the young adult Bible Study of Queen's Chapel United Methodist Church about what preaching is, their needs around it, and their reaction to various sermon styles. From these conversations and from the writer's own frustration with his own sermonic model it was clear that a newer approach was needed. This approach led to the creating of a preaching methodology informed by the Hip Hop imagination.

Chapter six discusses the journey of the project which includes the collection of data which will be outlined, its analysis, and the outcomes.

CHAPTER ONE

Ministry Focus

Benjamin Kevin Smalls was born in the city of Washington, DC. He is the son of Benjamin Smalls and Emma Green and the grandson of Woodrow and Manila Boyd. Life for him began on Sunday, May 31, 1970. His earliest memory is often that of his grandfather who died in their home when he was three years old, a couple of weeks before turning four. He remembers his grandfather being lectured or ignored by his grandmother as he struggled to stand on his feet while intoxicated.

Smalls would later grow into the realization that his parents were not where they were supposed to be. He noticed that at school and on TV parents lived together, did things together, and worked on family life together. His world was different as one was missing from this equation. His father lived across town while he and his mother lived with his maternal grandmother. I never had the privilege of my father dropping me off at school. He never had the joy of being escorted by both parents on the first day of school. Instead it was always his mother, with a blatantly absent father. She did make sure, that her son had a relationship with his father, but he never knew what it was like to have a joint relationship with his parents. It was never the three of them. Instead it was always two at a time, his mother or his father and him.

Kevin did find peace however. He was enrolled in Catholic school for first grade. He was surrounded by men and women (priests and nuns) who basically lived in church, were very happy and had a joy that he never saw at home. While they weren't married to each other, they were married to the church and that life had great appeal to the impressionable student. It appealed to him significantly as it was an alternative lifestyle from his experience at home. He began to wonder, even at such a young age, did his parents know of such peace that I saw others possess in Catholic school. I felt inclined to observe everything about the priesthood. I watched the look on their faces as they celebrated the Lord's Supper, Holy Eucharist. I watched how they all seemed to worship in rhythm, cadence, and structure that was beautiful and full of spirit. I would later recognize this as liturgy.

I felt that I wanted to do that. I wanted to wear those robes. I wanted to hold that cup and that loaf in my hand. I wanted to live in church with my fellow priests and sisters. They seemed to have so much happiness and so much fun. This community took me in and I especially became very close to my second grade teacher, Sister Elizabeth McGreevy. We called her Sr. Betty. She was young, enthusiastic, serious, and playful and a great teacher. It was while in her class that I caught the chicken pox and missed out on a project of making candy in class. Upon my return she and my mother agreed to let me go to the convent and we would make the candy together. She spent that time with me and we became very close. I told her I wanted to be a priest and she loved the idea. She was my first pastor, I will always believe. I feel that she saved the broken heart of this young boy who was struggling to find himself in the chaos of his family life. After leaving that school, I remained in touch with Sister Betty until her death in 2001.

While during the week I attended Catholic school on the weekends I was in attendance at the United Methodist Church during the weekend where my Uncle was the pastor. In the Methodist church the worship experience was rather different than what I experienced in the Catholic Church. In Catholicism, it seemed like the congregational responses were organized and filled with monastic type chanting while in Methodism the congregational responses were loud, communal and emotionally intense shared at random times throughout the worship experience. But, both churches celebrated the sacraments, joined in communal prayer, and had music to accent the experience. While sacraments were largely emphasized in the Catholic experience, preaching was an important aspect of the protestant experience. I learned to embrace both of these dynamics at a very young age and was obsessed with living this life before I reached double digits age wise.

While my life ecclesiastically was providing me much joy and a sense of great belonging I mourned at home. I mourned the loss of my family unit. My mother and father were divorced long before I was a toddler. In fact, it was rumored in my family that they were never married. I begged for them to find their way back to each other. I noticed that as time went on their relationship continued to deteriorate. I heard their conversations on the telephone which were subtle and somehow grew to be very explosive. They yelled, screamed, and cursed one another. I would run in terror and find solace under the covers of my bed and the comfort of my religious community.

These home challenges affected me academically. In the second grade I was reading on a sixth grade level but I was kept back. I remember crying, late on the night of the last day of school about the word "retained" on the line "Recommendation:" on the report card. My bedroom door was abruptly opened and

in walks my mother who comforts me and talks to me and assures me that I was not dumb, as I thought that I would do better next year. For the first time, I believed in myself. I believed that in the midst of failure there was hope and that my mother believed in me and that was enough to press on.

That same summer, in 1978, in our tree in the front yard was a bird's nest. Somehow a bird was dislodged from the nest and my mother informed me that the mother bird could not care for the bird anymore. So, I took the bird, put it in a box, and decided to take care of it. The very next day, I discovered that the bird was still, cold and eyes shut. My mother informed me that the bird was dead. I wept heavily over this loss. I felt that I failed the bird and that I could not keep it alive. My mother, who did not want me to keep the bird in the first place, was moved by my sorrow. We placed the bird in a cloth, a box and went to the top of the hill and buried the bird while I praying the Lord's Prayer in the midst of my uncontrollable tears. Up until this moment, I had never known a pain so immediate and so sharp. But, somehow, through that prayer, and my mother's compassion, I felt the love of God wrap around me like a blanket in the middle of a cold bitter winter.

The neighborhood that housed all of this vulnerability of mine was a Washington, DC neighborhood known as Michigan Park. Names of neighborhoods were essential to neighborhood rivalries in the District of Columbia. I had five friends and we formed what was known as the 11th Street Club. I was elected president and what we mostly did was rode our bikes, played go-go music with our junk yard band (Go-Go music was an inner city music style popularized in DC) and kept up our club house. We had a clubhouse in the backyard of one of our friends. It was ram shackled by a competing club down the street and we went to battle. This was my first experience leading or later "shepherding" a group of people. We had

activity, we had liturgy (the band), and we had challenge keeping up the club house from danger from others. I moved away from that neighborhood as I entered middle school. My friends gathered around me in the alley gripping me up as we said our good-byes and so longs. It was a moving moment for me and from then on I would be moving closer and closer to a life of ministry that would be supported and undergirded by these formative experiences.

My conversion experience occurred when I decided that I was going down the wrong road and as a result was deeply upsetting my mother. One semester in middle school I received straight D's on my report card and I seemed to always be getting in trouble. My mother had remarried by this time and I was challenged in getting along with my stepfather. Again, I found myself in a miserable family situation. One night, I just opened a New Testament Bible and it fell on the place in Matthew's gospel, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest...Take my yoke upon you for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." At that moment, I felt this invitation to come directly to me from Christ. I felt he promised that his yoke was easy and his burden light. I felt that he knew what I had been going through and desired to show me a life only made whole by coming unto him. I felt that I was saved and I immediately wanted to be baptized and join the church. On Easter Sunday, 1984 I walked down the aisle to say publicly, "yes to God".

My call to the ministry happened on a youth retreat which was an entirely different "neighborhood" than that of Michigan Park. These youth were from all over Maryland. They were happy, energetic, in love with God and had a great appreciation for the church. I made friends that I would keep for the rest of my life. These friends were not as harsh as those in the inner city. I was not teased

relentlessly; I was not sized up by my clothes and I was accepted as I was. I found a new sense of community and joy. It was almost as if I found my earlier Catholic experience again, but this time in the fold of the United Methodist Church.

So far, it was worth noting that God has always had me in dual places that were completely opposite of each other. Earlier in life, my Catholic school experience tempered my home experience. At this time, my conversion experienced went along side my matriculation at Theodore Roosevelt High School in Washington, DC.

In the late eighties DC was engulfed in the war on drugs. Every weekend seemingly, we were attending funerals of those killed in drive-by shootings and drug related murders. Hundreds more were being arrested for moving or distributing drugs throughout the city. The introduction of crack to the drug scene had seen hundreds of youth and adults walk around neighborhoods, many pounds less with involuntary body movement that would become easily identifiable among users of crack. It was a sad epidemic in the city as in many cities across the country. Thousands of lives were lost during this time of disaster and turmoil to drug overdoses and other complications associated with the highly addictive drug of crack.

During the singing of the doxology at that youth retreat I heard my call to ministry. I thought about all of my friends back in DC who were caught up in this urban climate of disease. I thought about the mother of my school mate who prostituted with our friends in school to maintain her crack habit. I thought about my fellow saxophone players in band that sold drugs in the halls. I thought about the raging AIDS epidemic and the several that I knew of who were dying of the ruthless disease. I thought about the mayor of DC who was rumored to be using

drugs as well. This would later be confirmed by a sting done by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. I thought about the drug use I discovered in my own house by relatives. I thought about all of the trouble so many seemed to be in, all of the sadness of mothers burying their children, incarcerated fathers and teens who found riches by making thousands of dollars selling drugs; driving expensive cars and wearing expensive clothes. It was during the singing of that doxology that I heard the voice of God, a sad voice, calling me to make a difference by giving my life to share the joy that I felt in that circle. My call was to spread the love and joy of God and to tell the masses that there is another way and that Jesus Christ will give peace and shelter from our trials of broken families, deficits of love, and loss of hope.

When coming back home I shared with my family and Methodist congregation that I was called to the ministry and I wanted to become a pastor. My great uncle, who was the pastor of Ebenezer United Methodist Church and my mentor began to “home school” me and train me in the ways of leadership in the life of the church. Every Sunday I was in the pulpit, learned how to read scripture publically, learned the various aspects of the service, offering, altar call, etc. It was wonderful and I loved having these opportunities to serve.

The crowning experience for me, however, was when he wanted me to be the preacher for the service on February 7, 1987. That Sunday was one of the installments in the church’s 150th anniversary, Youth Sunday and Black History Month in one. I preached my first sermon, “What are you doing with your Freedom?” from Galatians 5. I was amazed at the power brought forth in the preached word. I looked out on the congregation and felt the power of God as folks stood up, hollered back at me, and gave me an enormous standing ovation at the conclusion of the sermon. We were all in tears.

Looking back I realize that the congregation was so proud of me more so than the quality of my sermon. It was a pretty basic message, but the sermon belonged to all of us communally. We all celebrated not just what was said, but the fact that I was somehow one kid of many, who got the message and saw the beauty of faith and received the Gospel story and was willing to proclaim it on their behalf.

I knew from this moment that I was made to preach. I was made to join the line of sons and daughters that stood behind the sacred desk to point to the Gospel way. I grew up in a tradition of excellent preaching. I remember seeing folks stand, shout, weep, and dance to powerful preaching. The congregation gathered around the sacred desk loaded with expectation and I'd sit among them, in the midst of them knowing that this was the life I was called to. I decided at a young age that I wanted to "tell the story" in a way that my friends could get it, could embrace it and could respond to it. I thought that I heard some of the best speakers around but I also felt that a certain type of style was missing from the sermons I was hearing. I did not hear any sermons that penetrated the young, urban, inner-city, seeking, struggling, and lost youth of the city. I always worried about this segment of society and how we, the church were vastly and largely disconnected from this segment of society. In response to this deep need I sensed, I welcomed my call to preach not just to the church but to those who had questions, concerns, fears, and longings that the church did not seem to address.

These formative years ended with sweet memories of my home church, the many people who ushered me into a whole new life. I ended my teenage years at Ebenezer, with a sermon. It was entitled, "Sometimes, it causes me to tremble". I remembered St. John's, Sr. Betty and had grown to recover from my sense of deficit left by parents who were deeply at odds. At my graduation dinner, I noticed that

around the table were my parents, both of them, my uncle and grandmother and best friends. It all came together and it was now time to pursue this sacred calling on a different front (a college campus) in a different age bracket (early twenties). For years to come, I would live in between a deep reverence for liturgy, a passion for preaching a requirement for wholesome community, and a deep sadness in the midst of conflict and trial; personal and in community.

Claflin College

In 1989, I arrived at Claflin College as a 19 year old youngster, determined to not repeat the mistakes of my parent's marital disaster. I was determined to find a wife and launch an excellent path to the ministry and somewhere therein leave with a degree.

I had the time of my life as a freshman, on my own for the first time. I quickly became immersed in college life so much so that I was more of a young adult more so than a young man preparing for the seminary. I attended parties, had geographical rivalries with fellow students, competed with my roommates for the best dressed and the prettiest girl. We debated national issues, retold our childhood stories, walked to McDonald's for Sunday dinner, and slept in occasionally as an alternative to attending 8 o'clock class. This went on until the end of September when an enormous hurricane, Hugo swept through South Carolina. We, once friendly competitors, sat in the hall while wind with immeasurable speed blew through the state taking down trees, homes, and any electrical power available. We sat in the dark, terrified and as the storm grew and wrapped around our dorm I couldn't think of anything but preaching.

I saw all of the worried looks on the faces friends as they worried about home. I felt the power of God in the midst of that wind, the pouring rain and couldn't help but want to verbalize the omnipotent power of God. But, I quickly pushed that aside and sat in reverence to the power of that storm.

I emerged from that storm deeply aware of the deficit of faith among so many young people. I never doubted God's providence and wanted to assure my friends of the good news. But, I knew that to do so meant that I had to be available to the storm and its intimidating presence. I couldn't preach this message as an outsider. I would only be respected or even heard as a preacher without being able to share in the experience.

I began to realize that God was calling me to live life so that I might have something to preach. I was called to be available to my college experience and in some cases I felt that I was involved a bit too much.

I met a young woman who was what I thought to be the perfect preacher's wife. She was graced with beauty and spiritual awareness. We had become fascinated with each other. We loved being around each other and for the first time in my life I had the girl I could brag on. She was mine. I was hers. In October of 1992 she told me that she was pregnant. We began to strategize and I thought the best thing to do was to ask for her hand in marriage. It seemed the right thing to do. We moved so quickly and seemingly my life was changing before I could catch hold of it. Before I knew it, she was pregnant; I was married and about to conclude my college career. I was haunted by the frequent suggestion of whether I was doing the right thing. I felt guilty. I felt like I had not handled myself appropriately and as a result I had a big crisis on my hand. The crisis was tempered with the irresistible

joy of knowing that soon, the best thing I could ever think of would soon be ours to share. We would have a child.

Everything continued to happen at a rapid pace. I lived with my grandmother's disappointment that I was moving too fast, my mother's joy of anticipating a grandchild and friends' confusion as to what I was doing. By the time I graduated from college, I had been married, anticipating a birth about two months away, enrolled in seminary, and was sent to my first appointment as a student pastor of two churches. There really was not any more time to be dream about what it would mean to be a preacher and a pastor of my own church. Now, I had to live the dream as a twenty-three year old man. I had to strive to preach on a weekly basis. Only on occasion did I do well, I felt.

My first few sermons were about fifteen minutes long and I was told by well-meaning congregants that I needed to preach longer. I tried to transpose seminary lessons into dynamic preaching. I tried to preach a gospel that would appease older members, which were in the majority. I began my ministry by ignoring my own voice, as it was attached to my own experience and instead attempted to continue in the tradition of what people understood preaching to be.

While being a pastor of these two small churches I lived in the Atlanta University Center and was surrounded by hip hop and young adult culture. Not only was I surrounded by it, I was a participant in it. During this time, Tupac Shakur the West Coast rapping icon, was gunned down and killed. I preached the next Sunday on the subject, "I ain't mad at cha." This was the title of one of Shakur's pieces and eulogized him by saying that "God wasn't mad at cha' and that God is not mad at us". I remember feeling the most alive as a preacher that day. While I preached the gospel I was able to link it to young adult life. I remember a young adult congregant

telling me on my last Sunday that “I ain’t mad at cha” was one of her favorite sermons.

I felt that I had come to a place where I had the permission to preach to young adults. Just as I experienced that storm with my friends instead of being an outsider watching them go through it, I gained a stronger voice. By this time, I had known love, I had known mistakes, and I had known being judged by on lookers, I had known disappointment, failed relationships, and just plain pain. The young adult community longed for a sermon product that was more along the lines of witness and not merely “preaching down to the listeners”. I felt that if we were to reach this group, I needed to live into a conversational style of preaching.

Therefore, I grew as a preacher and majored in homiletics while in seminary. I learned preaching in the way of Henry and Ella Mitchell. I learned the homiletic method that preaching began with a behavioral purpose, three moves, and a celebration. While I was able to duplicate this method I was still longing for a sermon form that had a strong anthropological engagement with the text and in so doing finding the voice of the God that according to Revelation, “moved to the neighborhood.”

This style that I sought was to name the life experience of what was going on in the neighborhood, especially among the followers of hip hop. I would continue to learn to engage this population while having a variety of unique preaching experiences where audiences were largely young adults.

At the conclusion of seminary, I moved forward with a four year old son but sadly my wife and I did not successfully sustain our marriage. While in our early twenties we hardly had the maturity to manage marriage, a new baby, very little income and the demands of congregational life. It was one of the most difficult

moments in my life to realize the quest that I was on since college, to not repeat the mistakes my parents made and somehow I was following the same path. I remember trying to tell my son why his parents would not be sleeping in the same house. I remember the pain of telling my denominational superiors and my congregation of this adjustment in my personal life.

Soon after this split, I received the phone call on a Sunday afternoon asking had I heard from my mother. Fifteen minutes later, my grandmother called frantically telling me that my mother was "gone". The world stood still. The world stood still. I went to her home to find her lying lifeless in her bed. I knelt down and wept at her side. For the first time in my thirty years of life, she was not answering me. She looked peaceful and calm. But, the inner me was raging with grief, shock, and disbelief. Earlier that morning we spoke and I didn't know it would be the last time.

I did not preach for a month and I tried to move on, carrying my grandmother who meant the world to me. She was now without her only child and her deterioration began. We clung to each other but the circle was brutally and abruptly broken.

The next year my grandmother calls me to tell me that the doctor sees some Alzheimer's from several tests. Her decline would slowly begin and before too long we had to bring her out of the home that housed our memories, stories, dinners, celebrations and sorrows since 1958. My children are the third generation to grow up in that house. I had to painfully watch the disease take charge of my grandmother's mind, personality, and temperament. I find myself immersed again in the midst of conflict. This time, it wasn't my parents. This time, I was in conflict with a disease. I was in conflict with a disease that was attempting to steal my

grandmother. At times, I felt it was my grandmother with whom I was in conflict. When she couldn't remember the simplest things, when she couldn't comprehend things that she would have figured out in a moment's time, and when she would not calm down it seemed like her, it sounded like her but it was easy to forget that it was not her. It was a disease roaring in aggression and rage.

With my mother's earthly absence I now had to step up and be the patriarch of the family. In the initial days of her illness her house, the house that we loved, the house where her daughter was raised, the house where I learned to play, read, and write and the house in which my grandfather left his world was becoming a tomb of memories for her that seemed to haunt her through the night. She was becoming afraid of noises she would hear downstairs. Upon visiting her, evidence of poor eating, leaving stoves on, and very little activity of hygiene became apparent. I begged her to change, but she would not. She could not. As a result, I took her in until I had to make the painful choice of placing her in a home where she could get better care.

Seemingly, I was learning to preach through a season of loss and pain. These years of growing up would prove to be filled with enough of life substance to have a unique sense of the fact I could be nothing without God. My reactions to these trials were not always healthy ones. I was a runaway preacher trying to find a place of shelter and recovery in places that were not always healthy. I was becoming the ones to whom I preached. This is the human condition. I felt like I was on a mission or that my calling was to learn what life was so that I could preach and proclaim the Word of God with power and conviction. I want and need to preach as a witness. Up to this point, I have now collected a few experiences of conflict, loss, pain, trial, grief, and emotional collisions.

Vocation

Since a little boy I've always wanted to be a preacher. I was fascinated with the life of a preacher. I was drawn to everything about the pastoral office that I could detect from a pew. I watched preachers carefully. I watched how they moved, walked, talked and the small details like shake hands with congregants. I imagined what I would look like wearing one of those robes or sporting one of those clergy shirts. I dreamed of it and desired it badly. I asked my mother if I could hold a "trial sermon" in our basement. She agreed. I asked my childhood friend to be my assistant minister for the day. Our choir was Aretha Franklin's gospel record. My sermon was an article out of some religious publication entitled "what's in a name". The bar was my pulpit and an old graduation garment from one of my cousins was my robe. We ended the service with a benediction when one of the gentlemen, my Uncle TJ asked if we could raise an offering and we raised fourteen dollars and I kept seven dollars and my friend, Gary kept seven dollars. After the service, my mother was so proud of me and told me that one day, "I'd be up there for real".

Sixteen years from this experience my mother organized in the way of event coordination as only she could, I was up there for real. I began my ministry in a two point charge. I had the great privilege of taking a two year leave from the local church to work on the Bishop's staff as an associate council director with a focus on developing young adult ministry. I was a young adult myself. I had my first pulpit at the age of twenty-three. I began to organize young adult experiences that centered around three principles. These principles were to be inspired in a way that someone would respond with "wow, I didn't know that"; then to be challenged in

way that someone would respond, “hold up, I don’t know about that” and lastly, to have pure fun, loaded with the freedom of laughter, joy and shenanigans that are often found in rich abundance in young adult gatherings and community.

These were some of my most engaging years in ministry. The groups garnered the name the Young Adult Christian Café and we were known for a marvelous time. Some thought that we were laying the blue print for a new church. From this ministry form I became fascinated with the theme of culture and religion and how God is experienced in this way. For example, my young adult life was in a culture that was post-civil rights that was seeking something deeper as in a personal interpretation and fulfillment of current everyday life.

One avenue I found in naming this life was that of the arts and poetry. When I was younger my mother was very interested and fascinated with the Harlem Renaissance. I felt like I was walking through the streets of Harlem watching African American’s in their fashionable dress; I could hear the jazz fill the streets and above all I could listen to the poetry jump from the pages and find a rhythmic beat in my heart. My mother would read me poems from Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I a woman” and Langston Hughes, “Mother to Son”. The souls of the Harlem Renaissance filled my house like aroma from a pound cake baking in the oven. Accompanied by this was also my first hand witness of my mother and her girlfriends. They seemed to have a common experience, having dating and known a few men who were returning from Vietnam. Some of these men were wounded physically and mentally. Even a few, like one of her high school boyfriends, committed suicide. Many of them were also victimized by their husbands, boyfriends, or children’s fathers physically. My mother was physically abused by

my father as one time he beat her so badly that she wrapped her only baby boy up in the middle of the night and ran for help and shelter.

On top of this, I had to watch my mother, even though much of this journey was kept from me, battle breast cancer and endure a mastectomy. I watched her work with cancer patients with the American Cancer Society. This gave me a great sense of service, but not just any service, but service from a Black woman's perspective. Because I was her only son, sheltered under her wings of comfort, I saw much of the world through her eyes. I would later learn to name some of her insights, perspectives, and faith as womanist. After reading the works of Alice Walker and later Jaqueline Grant, Katie Geneva Cannon and Renita Weems I felt the essence of my mother's story, theological underpinning, and strength in their words. Primarily, this womanist sense was different from feminism in that it was not an anger or a vendetta against men, but an uplifting of a story that was often born out of an affirmation of the men that they loved. Womanist thinkers were clearly hurt by men but had a redemptive element to them. As much as my father bruised my mother, if it were not for her, he and I would have never cultivated a relationship. She encouraged it and pushed it and to this day, he and I are connected as father and son. I too, having learned their story have offered him redemption, from this gospel laced with a womanist perspective.

These experiences are what cultivated my homiletic kerygma. I grew as a preacher over the years, in season and out. I have pastored a rural southern church, a wealthy county seat church, and an inner city congregation. Each congregation was African American but vitally different in terms of homiletic requirements. The first three appreciated narrative preaching. The current congregation has given me the most challenge in terms of the preaching product. Some want deductive, three

point preaching, and a poem. Others have an appreciation for narrative and abstract sermon forms. The youth and young adults want a more transparent view in terms of demonstrations from the preacher's personal story as to how to live the gospel. They want to connect with the preacher as a sojourner rather than have the preacher lecture to them as some distant being who cannot name their story, journey, and experience.

My ministry would continue to unfold in the midst of these listening requirements for preaching and as I attempt to find my own voice in a multiple and diverse congregation of listeners.

Context

Queen's Chapel United Methodist Church was founded in 1868 in a small community called Muirkirk in the state of Maryland. Maryland is the ninth smallest state, the nineteenth most populous and the fifth most densely populated. It has the most in terms of median income per household and is therefore considered the wealthiest state in the country.¹ In the recent 2012 election the state voted to expand gambling venues and to allow gay marriage in referendum questions seven and six respectively. The state is governed by a democratic governor. Its racial makeup is majority white with the African American race being the second largest racial group.²

The state historically began under the leadership of George Calvert also known as Lord Baltimore. The city of Baltimore is named after Calvert. Calvert organized Maryland as a haven for Roman Catholics. However, in those early days

¹ Maryland, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maryland

² Ibid., Wikipedia

the citizenship included ex-convicts from England and Protestants. In terms of religious make up the state is majority Roman Catholic at 24%, Baptists 18% and Methodist 11%.³

The largest city in Maryland is Baltimore. The capitol of Maryland is Annapolis. Baltimore, the largest urban center in Maryland, has had its share of internal social challenges. In the eighties it was known as the "Crack Capitol of America" in that there was an epidemic of crack cocaine use and distribution in the city. Further, the number of homicides is currently over 1,000 a year.⁴ Queen's Chapel Church is just under 40 miles from Baltimore. Baltimore's urban environment was an impact to the Beltsville Community as well as other small communities in the Washington-Baltimore area.

A Congregation of the United Methodist Church Queen's Chapel United Methodist Church is one of 629 congregations in the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. The United Methodist Church was the result of a merger between the Evangelical United Brethren Church and the Methodist Church in 1968. At the time of merger, Queen's Chapel was a member of the Washington Conference which was the all Black Conference of what was known as the Central Jurisdiction. The Conference was integrated in 1968 and became the Baltimore Conference. In 1970, the denomination had a membership of a little over ten million people and while it has become a global church its membership has

³ Ibid., Wikipedia

⁴ Ibid., Wikipedia

decreased to seven million members since its uniting conference in 1968.⁵ This means that there has been a three million member decline in the past thirty years.

Historically, the Methodist Church has always been opposed to the institution of slavery and therefore it had great appeal among African American people. Queen's Chapel was founded just three years after the Civil War and twenty years after the Great Methodist Schism (over a bishop owning a slave) which took place in 1848. The annual conference in which Queen's Chapel now serves is currently battling a decline in membership, decline in worship attendance and the closing of several churches in the past twelve years. This dynamic is also seen across the church.

Historical Statement of the Congregation

Queen's Chapel United Methodist Church was founded in 1868, not long after the Emancipation Proclamation. The new church was founded in the nestled community of Muirkirk located in Beltsville, Maryland not far from Washington, DC. Muirkirk was a community of African Americans, some newly freed from slavery. The town included a collection of small African American neighborhoods that would be a major source of membership for the newly developed congregation.

The first pastor of the church, the Reverend William Draper enthusiastically began to organize the congregation along with five other churches.⁶ There were five churches on a charge to care for the many African American communities spreading throughout the Laurel region of Maryland.

⁵ General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church, http://www.gcah.org/site/c.ghKJI0PHIoE/b.3828783/k.1F6D/United_Methodist_Membership_Statistics.htm

⁶ Queen's Chapel United Methodist Church History, 1984. "On Christ the Solid Rock we Stand." 116th Church Anniversary Booklet.

The land for the church was sold to five individuals primarily Mr. Thomas Queen. The land for the church was centered in an old cemetery of African American slaves. The first church was built as a log cabin but was later destroyed by lightening. This must have been very disheartening to the congregation to have lost its building after having it less than thirty years. This loss, in 1899, prompted the congregation to begin its efforts to construct a new building. While the congregation was in its second building project and without its original log structure the congregation worshipped in Abram's Hall up the street from the original site.

Mr. Charles Coffin, a business leader in the community, a primary employer of the community and an owner of a furniture store, gave the church the financial resources to build the new edifice provided that he could choose the design. In 1901, the congregation celebrated its new building and the cornerstone was laid. Mr. Coffin was paid off in 1909. The building was a white framed structure built with Georgia Pine.⁷

As time went on, the Rev. Dr. Levi Miller became the pastor in 1945 and initiated a vision to build another structure located on a lot adjacent to the current building. Some met this vision with resistance and it took several years, eleven to be exact to get the third structure built. It was in 1953 that the new church was built, across from the site of the original structure. In the new church there was indoor plumbing, a fellowship hall and kitchen and a sanctuary that would house up to 240 people. The church would occupy this building for almost fifty years before completing its current structure in 2011.

⁷ Ibid.

Since 1984 the church expanded its ministries, grew in number, and under the leadership of Rev. Leon Kess, appointed in 1983, introduced the vision of yet a newer structure that would house the quickly growing congregation.

During this time, the music ministry, already a storied ministry continued to reach new heights. Queen's Chapel was almost always known by its music ministry. For example, the male chorus had been organized around 1960. The music ministry also organized a young people's choir and various choirs that sang anthems and hymns. The church worked hard on the music ministry giving lessons to choir members in how to read music as well as bringing in other musical clinicians to help the choir achieve a great sound.

The musical tradition of Queen's Chapel had three leading families supporting it through the years. These families were the Gibson's, Lomax's, and the Matthews. Mr. Phil Gibson was the Minister of Music. Mrs. Lomax was one of the first directors of the young people's choirs and was an accompanist to the male chorus. Mr. William Lomax was the director of the choir. Mr. Charles Matthews, a musical prodigy, grew up in the congregation and became the pianist and ultimately the Director of Music for Queen's Chapel Church. The Gibson's had many singers in their family and also had a singing group. Mr. Lomax's daughters began singing as children and were known as the Lomax Sisters. Sharon Lomax, the oldest Lomax child is the director of the Mass Choir which was established in the eighties. By the mid-eighties the music ministry was fully established and known by all.

In 2001, the Rev. Dr. Bruce Haskins was appointed to the hospital and not long after his arrival he had become sick and heavily relied on the leadership of the church to care for various matters that impacted the church. Rev. Haskins was beloved by the congregation and under his leadership the average worship

attendance increased by almost half. He is well respected as an outstanding preacher among congregants and peers. One of the major decisions he made was to move the worship service to a middle school that accommodate the entire congregation and cut down on the number of services required on Sunday. After moving to the middle school, the worship attendance increased 50%.

In July of 2007, it was this writer's privilege to be appointed to Queen's Chapel UMC. Found was a church with great potential and possibility for further growth. In one of the first meetings held with a significant committee, a youth asked the question, "What did the new pastor intend to do to make church more relevant for them?" A new worship service was begun called Radical Sunday. Up until this point the worship attendance was averaging about 280. The first Radical Sunday brought in over 500 people. This topped the Easter attendance of that year. The service was designed as a multi-sensory experience that would engage other populations and subcultures, particularly urban youth. Dance, film, secular music with theological twists, and poetry were all aspects of the experience. While the worship experience was embraced by so many there were some who voiced concern over losing traditional aspects of worship. Nevertheless, the service received a lot of support from many congregants and visitors.

In addition to worship revitalization, the church's Building Project topped the list of goals. The church attempted to move forward but there were complicating pieces which included construction personnel's poor performance, frustration with the county permitting process and building committee dynamics. As a result, adjustments were made to overcome these challenges and the building project gained a little more momentum. In September of 2011, the church moved

into its new edifice. Since moving in, the church has enjoyed an increase in worship attendance, the addition of two new staff and over one hundred new members.

In 2011, Queen's Chapel completed its fourth building project in the church's history which has added 12,000 sq. ft. to the existing structure making it a 17,000 square feet plant. The sanctuary holds seven hundred people and in the building are eight classrooms, a chapel, a new fellowship hall, offices, and a Café. To prepare to acquire the building, the church embarked upon a capital campaign and raised \$600,000 in three years to defray the cost of the construction project.

According to the statistical records the congregation has a majority of women in the membership but boasts of a strong men's program.⁸ The church is composed of five major families along with newer members that have joined without relationship to those families. Most of these families have settled in Muirkirk/Beltsville over a hundred years ago. The congregation has a mixture of people from all ages, economic status, and educational levels. While there are many college graduates there is a similar number of blue collar workers, family business owners, and employees of the government, as in the school system, the Motor Vehicle Administration, the Post Office, and other Federal Employee agencies. The church includes in its membership a United States Presidential Cabinet Member as well as persons who are from the recovering community a few of whom were once homeless. The congregation, since 1980 has generally been served by long term pastoral assignments, the longest being that of Rev. Leon Kess who served from 1984 to 2001. From 1984 to 2007 the congregation has not experienced any major changes in its worship life, congregational make up or culture. In 2001, the

⁸BWC Conference Journal. Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference Journal, 2010, 728.

congregation moved to worship in a middle school and the first two years the attendance doubled but then began to experience a slow decline.

Theological Formation of the Congregation

Queen's Chapel is an African American United Methodist Congregation. To speak of its theology is best to begin speaking of its worship life. Queen's Chapel is a congregation that fervently worships through music, prayer and the preached word. Musically, it has a leaning toward the modern gospel music ushered in by Thomas Dorsey. There is also a reverence for music written in the eighties and nineties but not so much after that. The congregation is beginning to explore other genres of gospel music and worship styles. The congregation also has a deep passion for hymnody. Quite a few of the music is written by the current director of music, Chuck Matthews, a musical prodigy, who grew up in Queen's Chapel and learned to play there since he was eight years old.

In terms of homiletic style, the congregation has a leaning toward deductive preaching. They have been formed in the deductive sermon method which was a popular method in the African American preaching tradition during the sixties. They are content with an introduction, Biblical integration, three points, and a conclusion. They tend to lean toward devotional preaching as opposed to prophetic militant sermon form.⁹ This information was gleamed from a pastoral/congregational evaluation in 2009.

In 2008 the culture, worship and other entities began to shift and change. A new worship service was added every fifth Sunday to cater to seekers and younger

⁹ Pastoral Evaluation Notes. Notes from 2009 Pastor's Evaluation from Staff Parish Relations Committee.

congregants. The worship attendance, its first year, topped Easter Sunday attendance and is still the largest attending services among all. Many in the congregation experienced discomfort with the new style worship but many others welcomed it.

Worship for Queen's Chapel is based off of a typical Protestant Methodist Church order which includes lectionary observance, three to four scripture readings, affirmation of faith, and other ritualistic observances such as Holy Communion and Holy Baptism. On Radical Sunday these elements remain the same however, they are often adjusted by rewriting them to be relevant to younger generations. Therefore, the traditional elements of congregational worship are intact while those elements may experience a different style.

Family Life

Queen's Chapel values the role of family life in the midst of congregational life. At times, their gathering is similar to a family check-in experience where congregants recant stories of old, check on the well-being of family and community members, and offer support and encouragement where it might be needed. The individual family members have affectionate nick names and they are often heard when telling funny childhood stories. The families often congregate in different sections of the church to take on various ministries and they generally work well together in doing so. The families often are aware of neighborhood challenges and at times bring those to the altar and pray as community. These experiences are often only understood by those involved but they nevertheless are welcome to "tarry" at the altar on behalf of family members. When matriarchs and patriarchs die it impacts the congregation significantly and a feeling of sadness is detectable

throughout the sanctuary. Older people are held in high esteem at Queen's Chapel. Currently, the oldest member is 103 and is in weekly attendance at the worship services. The congregation very excitedly celebrates her birthday yearly. Also, the congregation has an outreach to the N.M. Carroll Home, a nursing home related to the United Methodist Church. Once a year, one of the choirs host a trip for the elderly patients and residents of the home to come to church and worship.

The Past

Queen's Chapel is a historic church that has strong links to the leaders who served years before. There is a strong reverence for how life was in the congregation years before. At times, members are very nostalgic and spend a lot of time recalling the dynamics, practices, and experiences that took place in their memory. They look to these servants as revered leaders who taught them the ways of the church. They are dedicated and devoted to their memory. Queen's Chapel has had a practice of raising its own leaders, staff, and musicians. As a result, these very persons become iconic in the life of the congregation as they are products of teaching from earlier congregational leaders. The church has great pride in various artifacts that have remained in the church through the years; original pews, choir robes, books, trophies, and pictures.

Fellowship

Queen's Chapel has a rich history of fellowship and cuisine. A famous dish is one called Muirkirk beans and fried chicken which is cooked to perfection. The Homecoming Celebration was established in 1960 and has been an annual event ever since. Women of the church (and some men) get together to purchase food,

organize it and cook it just in time for the big day. Many people have gathered to celebrate this annual event which highlights the opportunity to fellowship in a family style setting where there are no strangers. Also, fellowship is a large part of church family events such as weddings and funerals. In many ways, Queen's Chapel is reminiscent of an Old Testament village where the entire community gathers to celebrate new brides and grooms and mourn the passing of villagers. This time together is essential and necessary to the church's faith experience. This connection of support is very personal to all involved. Individual church members are very festive as well and often look to the pastor to attend birthday celebrations, cook outs, family reunions, retirement celebrations, etc. These events are often attended by many church members. Fellowship is a large value in church and beyond.

Lay Involvement

While the pastor is the leader of the congregation the church expects its laity to have primary roles in what happens in congregational life. The church has had two pastors during the periods of 1984 to 2007 that had vision impairment and a significant heart condition respectively. During these twenty three years, the congregation had grown accustomed to making sure the sick were visited, the worship life of the church was organized, planned out, and structured and that liturgists and worship leaders were largely responsible for presiding over the principal worship experiences in church. According to a seasoned member of the congregation, the church has been a church with a strict adherence to cultural norms. In the thirties and forties, if women wore pants and men did not have on a tie, they would be harshly lectured by the older in the community. Therefore, the laity had a strong roll in defending the practices of the church and to make sure that

the membership held to the appropriate practices. Over time, the congregation has launched into the future by expanding ministries to new and potential members, expanding its technological base by adding various state of the art enhancements of the administrative life and programmatic aspect of the church's ministry. Due to strong lay talents and capabilities these efforts are done without having to hire contractors and professional outside vendors to do the work. Queen's Chapel has always had a culture of having its own provide for the needs of the church.

Generational Relationships

Queen's Chapel continues to retain many of its members even though post high school journeys take members to various life experiences beyond Muirkirk. The young adult generation of the 1980s saw a rise in drug use in many cities across the country. As a result, there is a large recovering community within Queen's Chapel. The current youth and young adults are fully immersed in Queen's Chapel culture and the torch has been passed to a few of them in terms of music, cooking, leading, and serving. The diversity of the membership in terms of its educational, economic, and social status is very much seen in the young people as well. Many youth are on their way to college while some of have decided that they would like to pursue other routes such as the military and vocational schools. Among the young adults who are in their thirties there are school teachers, police officers, morticians, truck drivers, business owners, engineers, attorneys and academicians. The young people are ushering in an age that is quite different from their forerunners. This is the age is the age of technology. Technology has globalized the "neighborhood" of Queen's Chapel and as a result the sociological environment is one of a new frontier. The New Frontier has been a term used to describe the social location of the

congregation since moving back into its home. The idea is that many people come from far and near, different cultures, and different backgrounds to create community. People are invited to metaphorically lay down their bags and set up their tents where they are and make the terrain of Queen's Chapel their home.

As this Frontier unfolds, there are many challenges ahead which include how to bridge the gap between the old and the new; how to create a worship product that captures the imagination and hearts of a diverse people and how to preach to a congregation that is blessed with a diverse number of sojourners among them maybe be some who have never known or heard the gospel proclaimed.

Growing up in Washington, DC in the 1980s was a time when so many youth were driven by crime, hooking school, drug experimentation, promiscuous sex, fashion, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and fear of a nuclear war. These were some of the items on the plates that dominated youth and young adult life while the writer was traveling through high school.

Theodore Roosevelt High School was a Washington, DC public school in the northwest quadrant of the city. It was not exempt from the horrific violence plague the city. From time to time, students would be killed in over-the-weekend drive by shootings. Drug dealers would often be in attendance and attend class along with the writer.

There have been times when the culture was dominated by a quest to be grown. To be grown meant having fashionable clothes, an active sex life, preferably a nice car to drive (not just any car), and in some cases children. In one case there was a student who had a thirty-eight year mother and three children. The mother, thirty-eight years old, was also a grandmother of two children. In another scenario, an honor student was raped by her stepfather who was on a rampage after her and

her little brother. She bravely hid him in the closet while he offered herself to be beaten and abused by her stepfather.

Seemingly, every Monday, students were arriving to school from a weekend filled with crime, someone having a baby, someone being funeralized or someone being arrested. It was a very difficult time as not only Washington, DC but cities across the country wrestled with the problems that plagued inner-city youth.

There was a film portraying this kind of inner-city chaos in the 1986 movie "Lean on Me". "Lean on Me" was a movie about the fearless Mr. Joe Clark who became principal of Eastside High School in the city of Patterson, New Jersey. In the film youth and young adult life is portrayed in a school where drug dealers dominated the hall, some of whom were not even enrolled in the school, teachers getting beaten up by the students, test scores being the lowest in the state, and the horrific epidemic of drug use and distribution. Poverty was also an element uncovered in the movie as parents struggled to inspire their children to learn. In one case a student's mother wanted to throw her out. In another case, three hundred students were expelled on the same day.

On the other hand, the writer also spent two years in another high school in Prince George's County, ninth and tenth grade, Crossland High School. Crossland was in southern Prince George's County which today is one of the wealthiest black counties in the United States. While there were social challenges of teenage pregnancy, school drop outs, and drug use, it was seemingly not as obvious and clear. What was clear was the sense of materialism, the large suburban homes, the mega church down the street from the school where so many of the students attended and the sorrowful epidemic of the AIDS virus. What was apparent was the student parking lot in the back of the school which seemed to be loaded with cars.

Also, the student body was racially diverse and many interracial couples emerged in this particular high school.

The writer noticed how there were two vastly different worlds among people of color, separated only by a bridge that led to the nation's capital. Yet, there was a common feel in the air. That feel was "these kids have a story, they have pain, they have questions, they have doubt, they have sorrow, and they are emotionally exhausted looking for love". The writer was one of these kids but the writer felt deeply that there was hope. There was hope to be experienced and achieved.

This is the urban and suburban environment in which the writer grew up. The writer, having been called to the ministry at the age of seven was known by his classmates as "preach". He was sought after by many people, friends, and fellow students who seemed to have their own pastor in the teenage sage. Every week, based on life he experienced while going to school, riding the bus, hanging out in the malls, laughing with his buddies in the cafeteria or watching the latest fight in the hall, he'd come up with an imaginary sermon title to address the challenges he witnessed. He felt, even then, that his friends needed a Word. They needed to be engaged with the liberating Word of God. From the writer's young perspective, the youthful generation was missing out on an amazing God while being too busy living out of scarcity, desperate for the commodity of love and willing to do anything to just feel loved.

This would drive the writer's passion for years; that of being a preacher of relevance.

The writer had his own struggles and difficulties. The writer grew up to the reality of divorced parents. The writer never remembers his parents being together. When the writer came of age, he realized that he never had the family of a mother

and father and this created a great deficit in him. All he wanted, seemingly is to have a sense of family.

From time to time, he would hear his parents engage in hateful and rage filled conversations accompanied with yelling and screaming. This would make him very sad. His mother placed him in therapy as a child and the therapist pointed out to his mother that he “yearned for family.” At an early age he witnessed other families, resourced with a mother and a father. He felt badly that he did not have that experience of his own. He felt inadequate as he lived with his mother and grandmother while his father lived across town.

He did not realize how his father was physically abusive to his mother in those early days of the seventies. He did not know that they had a tumultuous life together. He took their divorce personally. As a result of this, he would grow up with a deep sense and regard of belonging to something.

Attending Catholic school gave him that sense of belonging that he sought. That community gave him the sense of overwhelming love, peace, and happiness. The church was an alternative to the life of brokenness at first hand. It would be years before he would uncover his own brokenness and utilize it as a means to impact the inner need that all, especially the youth and young adult’s needs, would have a fresh sense of belonging, a home. When the home was broken, and many were, there was a diaspora of sorts where many entered youth and young adult ages trying to achieve the love they could not seem to capture at home.

As the writer grew older, he learned the values of broken roads and experiences. He also learned that while it seemed as though he was in a vacuum, he never was. There were many others living like him. This is what prompted his own call to the ministry. That of going forth and touching the pain and hurt of people

who sought resolution and peace from the harsh and bitter journey known as life would undergird his ministry for years to come.

While the writer had a very active and busy youth in the civic environment he also had one in the ecclesiastical environment. He attended Brightwood Park United Methodist Church as a little boy which happened to be up the street from the high school he would later attend in the northwest corner of Washington, DC. Brightwood Park was led by his great uncle as the pastor of the church. His great uncle was recruited by the United Methodist clergy to serve the church. His uncle came over to the United Methodist Church having grown up a Baptist. If his uncle never served in the United Methodist Church, it is highly possible that the writer would have been a Baptist as the family went to whatever church his uncle was pastoring.

Being a former Baptist minister, his uncle had a great appreciation for the preached word. Preaching was an art form and whenever guest preachers were invited they seemed to have a special gift of delivering an incredible message. Soon, his uncle was appointed to a larger Methodist church on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC and at this church there was a preacher he grew up from that church that would often come back to preach. Whenever he did, he would stir up the congregation so much that people would respond with great emotional outburst of joy and jubilation.

Dr. Charles Albert Johnson II was a United Methodist preacher that grew up in a Methodist parsonage. As a youngster, story goes that he would go to all kinds of churches to hear preaching. He would go to storefront churches, Baptist churches, Pentecostal churches, and a few others. Watching, Dr. Johnson preach inspired the writer to study preaching. The writer had many mistakes made in trying to be a

great preacher like that of Dr. Johnson. Dr. Johnson was sought after from every denomination and whenever he preached many came far and near to hear him.

For years, the writer studied why the preacher was so great. One was, his oratory. He was a good speaker from a public speaking stand point. He had a tenor voice and when he would raise his voice it never seemed to crack but it kept an impressive tone. He was a physically large man but his voice was gentle but captivating. He also preached with his body. His entire body responded to his preaching passion. He had a move with his foot that would become his signature. He would also move around as he reached climatic points in his message. Thirdly, he had a way of bringing the text alive in a way where it would surprise the listener with an in depth meaning by his brilliant way of telling a story. Lastly, the preaching of his day was deep in deductive and formal preaching in United Methodism. He somehow, painted the deductive preaching model with so much color, vision, and storytelling that it could not be duplicated. His voice would fall to a debilitating stroke and he'd never be the same as a preacher, but it was not without trying. He had multiple strokes and lost his speech. Yet, the writer felt that he was blessed to have heard this preacher preach.

Another preacher in the Wesleyan tradition was Dr. Cornelius Henderson (later Bishop Henderson) who dazzled congregations with clever speech, evangelistic quips, and electric celebrations. The writer seemed to live in two worlds as a youth. He wanted to figure out how to bridge the gap between these great preaching experiences and the moral decay that was destroying lives, families, and community life.

It was not that these preachers were ineffective. They were not. Yet, while the church was filled with people so were the drug dealers and crack addicts filling

the streets. Many youth grew up in church and developed a strong appreciation for it. "But, what about those who did not grow up in church", the writer would wonder.

Life was hard as a youth, but the writer is convinced that it was the ministry of the preached Word that brought a sense of redemption, hope, and experience of encounter with God that kept the writer on the right path.

What is worth noting, as the writer approaches this project is in those days, his denomination's congregations were full, and at minimum half full. The religious climate was much more active than that of the current one. Presently, many of those congregations that were full in the seventies and eighties are either empty with only a handful remaining or closed as those congregations endure aging memberships and a swiftly gentrifying city.

No longer do the congregations gather around excellent preaching. Something has happened to the church's passion around preaching. The writer fears that if his denomination does not quickly recover the passion for the preached word it will quickly lose its relevance and importance to those who desperately seek to know who He is.

As it stands, the writer is the current pastor of a healthy and vital congregation, Queen's Chapel United Methodist Church. In his congregation are five generations but even among the five, the generations that are the thinnest are those who are younger than 35 years old. Out of the three hundred people that have joined Queen's Chapel under his leadership, he has noted that the average age of those joining is mid-fifties and up and the larger gender of those joining is women.

The writer feels that he has a chance to prevent Queen's Chapel from slipping into the inevitable decline if the congregation is not replenished with a

younger congregational base. As a result, the writer feels that the preaching he grew up to listening, emulating, and striving to continue must continue but must also find a way to revitalize itself to the newer congregants and potential congregants.

This newer genre of preaching is where the writer's context and life path intersect. The writer is seeking to create a fresh methodological approach to preaching to younger audiences by revitalizing exegetical methods, creating new guidelines for preaching effectively and tapping into the postmodern theological and social locations to effectively connect with the community at large.

When the writer was in seminary in the mid-nineties Hip Hop was alive and well in the Atlanta area. It was the period known as the third trajectory of Hip Hop when the music was more about the subject of awareness, justice, and political commentary. However, there was an intense West Coast and East Coast battle going on largely between Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls.

The weekend that Tupac Shakur was shot and later died to his gunshot wounds the writer was the pastor of two small churches in rural Georgia, just south of Atlanta. That morning, the morning the writer, a new pastor-preacher, decided to put aside the lectionary text for that day and in his own way eulogize Tupac Shakur with the title of one of Shakur's signature pieces, "I ain't mad at cha". The preacher addressed how youth are seeking reconciliation of broken relationships. The text was taken from Paul's letter to the church at Rome, fourth chapter that says, "Because we have peace with God, there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus". For the preacher, God's loudest message to this community is that God is not "mad at cha"

The preacher closed his sermon with these words: "TuPac, we aren't mad at cha' and neither is God". The preacher concluded the sermon that way and sat down.

For the first time in the preacher's young ministry, a young person came up to him and shared that was the best sermon he'd ever heard and will be his favorite for a long time to come. It was a lightbulb moment. After church, every Sunday the older people would shake the pastor's hand and offer their appreciation for the message which was preached deductively as the preacher's teachers taught him.

This time, the preacher visited his own world and the world of those around him and came out of that world with a Word from God. "God ain't made at cha!"

This project will seek to secure the way to illicit a response from more young people who suggest, "That's my favorite sermon. For a long time, that will be my favorite."

CHAPTER TWO BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

This doctoral project is an exploration in the possibility of creating a genre of preaching for the Hip Hop community. The elements of Hip Hop include rap, graffiti, DJing, and break dancing. All of these art forms, however, are expressions of life, that are born out of family, relationships, community rivalry, stressed issues with authority and individual sojourn. This is hip hop.

The Old Testament story is centered on four families. The hip hop story is also centered on family life in the neighborhood. It is a musical, written, and verbal description of life in the neighborhood. This life is often depicted as unfair, rough, difficult, unjust, and painful. The underlying need is one of authentic community. Hip Hop also glorifies neighborhood life in a way that recognizes it as it being somehow beautiful. Tupac Shakur brilliantly exposes some of these sentiments with his song, "Dear Mama". He begins the depiction of life between an urban young male and his mother by recalling his own story through a letter to her. The story, the rap goes this way.

When I was young, me and my mama had beef,
17 years old, kicked out on the streets,
Though back at the time I never thought I'd see her face.
Ain't a woman alive that could take my mama's place,
Suspended from school and scared to go home, I was a fool.
With the big boys breaking all the rules.
I shed tears with my baby sister.
Over the years we was poorer than the other little kids.
And even though we had different daddies, the same drama.
When things went wrong we'd blame mama.
I reminisce on the stress I caused, it was hell.

Huggin' on my mama from a jail cell
 And who'd think in elementary,
 Hey I'd see the penitentiary one day?
 And running from the police, that's right.
 Mama catch me, put a whoopin' to my backside.
 And even as a crack fiend, mama.
 You always was a black queen, mama.
 I finally understand.
 For a woman it ain't easy trying to raise a man.
 You always was committed.
 A poor single mother on welfare, tell me how you did it.
 There's no way I can pay you back.
 But the plan is to show you that I understand. You are appreciated.
 Now ain't nobody tell us it was fair,
 No love from my daddy cause the coward wasn't there.
 He passed away and I didn't cry, cause my anger,
 Wouldn't let me feel for a stranger.
 They say I'm wrong and I'm heartless, but all along,
 I was looking for a father he was gone.
 I hung around with the thugs, and even though they sold drugs,
 They showed a young brother love. I moved out and started really hangin'.
 I needed money of my own so I started slangin',
 I ain't guilty cause even though I sell rocks
 It feels good putting money in your mailbox.
 I love paying rent when the rent's due,
 I hope you got the diamond necklace that I sent to you,
 Cause when I was low you was there for me,
 And never left me alone because you cared for me,
 And I could see you coming home after work late.
 You're in the kitchen trying to fix us a hot plate.
 You just working with the scraps you was given.
 And mama made miracles every Thanksgivin'.
 But now the road got rough, you're alone.
 You're trying to raise 2 bad kids on your own.
 And there's no way I can pay you back.
 But my plan is to show you that I understand.
 You are appreciated.¹

¹Tupac Shakur. Dear Mama. Released February 21, 1995 by Interscope Records. From the Album, "Me Against the World. Recording.

I wish to engage possible Biblical intersections to Hip Hop as well as utilize as a foundation for this project, a consideration of an individual from the Old Testament and an entire community from the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the individual is Jacob. A brief examination of his life, sojourn, and theological implications for the difficulty thereto will be explored. The focus of this New Testament/Johannine review will be the conversation with Nicodemus in the third chapter and the incident around healing the blind man in the eleventh chapter.

With Jacob, a consideration of his journey being born into conflict, strained familial relationships and a life of struggle and challenge will be reviewed through an angle of hip hop culture. In the midst of these difficulties, God finds a way to deal with the mishaps of his behavior, his circumstances, and his life. While in John, as suggested prior, the community will be examined with a look at Nicodemus and the healing of the blind man. From these two episodes in John it will be clear to see how the issue of loyalty, public support of the Messiah and being bold in one's belief underline themes in Hip Hop music, literature and protests for social change and justice.

Both of these studies create the tension and the paradigm out of which Hip Hop-like voices grow. Jacob will provide an anthropological and theological assessment of a man on the run, from everyone he knows but most importantly from himself. John will reveal a community, a rather small one that is not just geographically based, but theologically based. John himself writes as a radical of sorts. "The fourth gospel we now read does not have the look of a composition by a committee. It stands today as it has for two thousand years as a coherent, profound, and challenging witness, itself sufficient evidence that the Johannine community had within it at least one great theologian and

writer.”² For John, either you believe or you do not. John’s driving theme throughout his interpretation of the historical Jesus is one that includes a message that demands strict and ardent belief in the Messiah. All conflict in John centers on the ability of one to sign on to this radical gospel claim that the sandal-walking-everyday-carpenter-dude is the actual Messiah. John’s Jesus does not seem to fit the image that the Temple (or community) as to what the Messiah should look like, be like and talk like. “He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.” John 1:10-11. This community seems to be divided around how to connect with this Messiah especially when such connection is a high cost in the religious environment of that day.

Jacob

The book of Genesis begins with the story of a few families including Adam and Eve, “Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob and Rachel and Joseph.”³ Seemingly, from a source criticism point of view, there are two contributors to the story of Jacob. One, from the angle of Essiac’s source and the other Jacobic. Essiac is in sympathy with Jacob while the Jacobic source is disappointed in Jacob’s actions. One is called the E source while the other, the J source.⁴ Jacob’s story begins in his mother’s womb in Genesis 25:21-25.

² Luke T. Johnson. *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 470. (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1986), 470

³ Walter Brueggeman. *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and the Christian Imagination*, 2003. (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2003), 43.

⁴ Leslie Brisman. *The Voice of Jacob*. (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1990), 67.

These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac,²⁰ and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean.²¹ Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived.²² The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?"^[c] So she went to inquire of the LORD.²³ And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, one and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger."²⁴ When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb.²⁵ The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau.²⁶ Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob.^[d] Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.⁵

He shares this womb with a twin. At birth, seemingly a scuffle ensues and Jacob loses the battle to exit first to his older twin brother Esau. His mother senses this battle in her womb and questions the Lord, "If it is to be this way, then why do I live?" (25:22.) The Genesis account describes this birth in such detail that one is informed of the origin of Jacob's thirst for power as he exits the womb. Jacob's hand is attached to his brother's foot in an attempt to come out the womb first. He loses this battle but would seek a few other opportunities to win in the future.

Jacob has two other experiences with his brother that gives indication of a family situation that is strained. Jacob seems to be good in the kitchen, along with his mother Rebekah while Esau is a master in the fields with the ability to hunt animals and bring them home for cooking. Isaac favored Esau for this.

⁵ The Harper Collins Study Bible by the Society of Biblical Literature, Harper Collins Press

Isaac and Rebekah were not divorced but it can be almost seen, behind the text, that the relationship between Isaac and Rebekah were strained. Their division could have arguably been inherited by their sons. Because of the unspoken tensions between these two parents, husband and wife, their sons are thrust into a competition heightened and symbolic of the dysfunction between their parents. This dysfunction is slowly revealed in two episodes between these embattled brothers. “When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.” Gen: 25

The first of two incidents between Jacob and Esau occurs when Esau comes in from the field, worn out, exhausted and hungry. Jacob takes advantage of this as his brother asks for some Lentil Soup that Jacob had been working on. Jacob suggests that he’d gladly give his brother some of his cooking if he gives him his birthright. According to Old Testament tradition, the birthright was always given to the eldest son. The majority of the inheritance would be given to the eldest and further, the same blessing given to Abraham would come through the eldest.

Esau forgets, due to extreme hunger, the weight of this birthright and reasons, “what good is a birthright if I’m dead?” At the first taste of soup he loses perhaps his greatest gift, the right to be first in line for the good that was to come. At this point, he traded this blessing as two children trade toys favored one by the other.

Chapters 27 and 28 include the second episode of deception which is much more intense and involved as Rebekah prepares Jacob to take the blessing that will be bestowed upon him by aging Isaac. Rebekah schemes to deceive her husband by sending him in to

his father camouflaged with hair on his arms very much like the hairiness of his twin brother.

Isaac and Esau prepare for this grand moment of blessing granting, but first, Isaac wants Esau to go and secure game for his pleasure. In the meantime, Rebekah sends her favorite son in with something to eat and tricks his father into offering him the blessing intended to go to his son.

This blessing was a spiritual one in addition to the birthright. This blessing is then robbed from Esau by his brother Jacob and his mother as the accomplice. This blessing officially makes Jacob the spiritual head of the household.

When Esau returns to his father to receive the blessing, then Isaac realizes what had been done as does Esau. “In the narrative that follows, Isaac sticks to the concept of exclusive blessing while Esau cries for more liberal interpretation, bless me too father!”⁶(27:34) Rebekah senses that Jacob will be killed by his older twin brother if he didn’t go away. Rebekah, sends her son off to her brother Laban away for refuge. The deeper impact is that though the blessing was illegitimately acquired, it was real. Rebekah, then, sends the one, who is the spiritual head of the household to another man’s house. Jacob found a way to get the blessing, yet, he could not use it, at least not now. This blessing would however go with him wherever he went, yet not without its challenges. “Jacob receiving and the blessing does not issue in a trouble-free life. In fact,

⁶ Leslie Brisman. *The Voice of Jacob: On the Composition of Genesis*. (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1990), 82.

they expose his life to more conflict than would probably other-wise have been the case, not least because of what he does with it.”⁷

Accordingly, Jacob seems to re-inseminate his mother’s pregnancy and finds a way to reverse the birth order and finally achieves being the first. Jacob secures that which he sought to gain at birth. That is being the first. Jacob now is the owner of his brother’s birthright and the paternal blessing, even though they were unethically secured. Jacob begins his journey from home, walking toward the home village of his uncle Laban. As night falls upon him, he stops and rests using a hard stone as his pillow. While he drops off to sleep he dreams of a divine encounter that includes a ladder emerging from the ground with angels descending and ascending on it. At the top of the ladder is the voice of God assuring Jacob that God is with him, that God will bless him, and that he will return to the land he just left. This is the gift of the birthright itself, to have the blessing of God upon him, a blessing that he did not deserve in this way or was not owed nevertheless. This blessing was also given to Jacob while he was on the run. This is what God specifically assured him of in chapter 28:

¹³ And the LORD stood beside him^[c] and said,
 “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and
 the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give
 to you and to your offspring; ¹⁴and your offspring shall
 be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad
 to the west and to the east and to the north and to the
 south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed^[d]
 in you and in your offspring. ¹⁵ Know that I am with you
 and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you
 back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done
 what I have promised you.” ¹⁶ Then Jacob woke from his

⁷ Leander Keck, editor. *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*. (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1994), 537.

sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!” ¹⁷ And he was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

Jacob arrives at Haran

After having this divine encounter, he arises assured and continues his journey to his Uncle’s village. Once he arrived, at the well he meets Rachel and kisses her. He is so moved by her beauty that he seems to fall in love with her at once. After meeting his uncle Laban, he soon asks to marry his first cousin, Rachel.

To win his daughter, Laban makes Jacob work for him for seven years. The text suggests that these years only seemed like a few days because of his love for Rachel. “At first Jacob loved Rachel because she was beautiful. But then the love strengthened as they came to know each other in the truest, deepest ways.”⁸ At the conclusion of the seven year period, Laban grants his nephew a wedding but it ends up being with the wrong bride. Jacob seems to get a taste of his own medicine. Possibly, the behavior of deception runs in the family, on his mother’s side. He is alarmed to discover that the woman he spent his first night of marriage with was Leah, Rachel’s sister, of whom the text suggests that is not as beautiful as Rachel.

Jacob confronts Laban with this painful act of deception and Laban suggests that he could not give him the youngest daughter before he gave the oldest. Laban told Jacob that another seven years would secure Rachel as his wife. Jacob begins another seven years to ultimately be with Rachel.

⁸Madeleine L ’Engle. *The Genesis Trilogy*. (Water Books Press, Colorado Springs, 1997) 282.

Jacob, then lives the first seven years of his marriage with a woman he did not choose. This had to create a difficult atmosphere for not only Jacob and the woman he really loved, Rachel, but also for Rachel and her sister Leah. The text informs us that Leah was not as pretty as Rachel. Dr. Renita Weems in her book *I asked for Intimacy* records the difficulty of this love triangle by suggesting that the only thing worse than loving someone that does not love you is loving someone that love someone else.”⁹

Jacob realizes that the Promised Land was gifted to him and it is time for him to leave Haran and return to Canaan, especially now that he has worked long enough to secure the woman he loves, Rachel. Jacob has this conversation with Laban and Laban realizes that much of his wealth is because of Jacob’s contribution to the family business. Laban negotiates this release with Jacob and then leaves with a commitment. Jacob’s plan created more wealth for him and as a result the livestock of Jacob’s surpassed that of Laban’s. Laban’s sons began to grow more and more envious and caused Laban to question Jacob’s motives. Once Jacob hears these circulating conversations he then begins to plot to leave. He gathers his wives, children and livestock and proceeds to leave without telling Laban. Laban catches up with Jacob and confronts Jacob with taking his children and some of his belongings, primarily law, uncle and nephew rise to the point of Jacob naming Laban’s treatment of him over the past twenty his gods (which were small statues). Jacob is unaware that his wife Rachel stole them and as Jacob curses the thief he is unknowingly cursing his wife. Tensions between Father-in-law and son-in-laws. This leads to an agreement that leads to an understanding, but not complete trust between Jacob and Laban, that becomes sealed with a blessing (with an undertone of

⁹ Renita Weems. *I asked for Intimacy: Stories of Blessings, Betrayals, and Birthings*. (Innisfree Press, Inc., Philadelphia, 1993), 62

distrust). “May the Lord, watch between me and thee, while we are absent, one from another, amen.” (Gen.32:49)

Up until now, Jacob had been running from Isaac, from Esau, from Laban and ultimately he runs into a wrestling match with God or some form of God’s divinity. All of Jacob’s life, he sought to steal blessings or secure them in ways that were not appropriate. This time, he is demanding to secure the blessing from the right source, meaning the source that can actually bless him. In fact, he is determined that this angel will not be permitted to leave until he blesses him. The angel pleads with Jacob to let him go. Arguably, Jacob emerges from this holy but intense battle with a damaged hip socket that causes him to limp or hop when he walks, for the rest of his life. It is a form of spiritually induced but orthopedically

Jacob then begins the journey to return home and he is met by Esau. To his surprise, Esau is overjoyed to see Jacob. These brothers reconcile. Seemingly, it is not until he finally gets blessed the right way and from the right source, does he secure the peace to make the journey home. “It was easier for Esau to forgive Jacob for his treachery than it was for Jacob to believe in or accept Esau’s forgiveness.”¹⁰ In terms of a Hip Hop connection, the rapper T.I. describes this life on the run through one of his hit pieces. Jacob can find a voice in this particular rap or more importantly, T.I., can find a connection with Jacob and his experience running most of his life. T.I.’s lyrics suggest:

¹⁰ Madeleine L. Engle, *The Genesis Trilogy. And it was good a stone for a pillow sold into Egypt.* (Waterbrook Press, Colorado Springs, 1983), 236.

Ever had one of them days you wish you would've stayed home?
 Run into a group of suckers who gettin' they hate on
 You walk by
 They get wrong
 You reply then things get blown
 Way outta proportion
 Way past discussion
 Just you against them, pick one then rush 'em
 Figure you get your hell that's next
 So They don't wanna stop there now they bustin'
 Now you gushin' ambulance rushin'
 You to the hospital with a bad concussion
 Plus your hit 4 times
 Bullet hit your spine
 Paralyzed waist down now your wheel chair bound
 Nevermind that now you lucky to be alive
 Just think it all started you fussin' with 3 guys
 Now your pride in the way, but your pride is the way
 You could mess around, get shot, die anyday
 Die everyday
 All over nonsense doe money dice game stash box contents.
 Could this be 'cos of hip hop music?
 Did the ones with the good sense not use it?
 Usually people don't know what to do when their back against the wall so they just start
 shootin'
 For red or for blue or for dough I guess
 From Bankhead or from your projects
 No more stress, now I'm straight, now I get it, now I take
 Time to think, before I make mistakes just for my family's sake
 That part of me left yesterday
 The heart of me is strong today
 No regrets I'm blessed to say
 The old me Dead & Gone away.
 Ohhhh (hey)
 I've been travellin' on this road too long (too long)

 Just tryin' to find my way back home (back home)
 The old me is Dead & Gone, Dead & Gone
 And ohhhh (hey)
 I've been travellin' on this road too long (too long)
 Just tryin' to find my way back home (back home)
 The old me is Dead & Gone, Dead & Gone, Dead...¹¹

¹¹ T.I. Rap lyrics for Dead and Gone released on January 13, 2009 by Grand Hustle, Atlantic Records.

Jacob is a story that intersects significantly with many of the issues with which the Hip Hop community wrestles. Some of these issues can very well be themes for Hip Hop preaching as well as avenues for the preacher to pursue when seeking to engage more contemporary listeners. Some of these themes include that of spiritual anthropology, family relationships, romance in the neighborhood, strained relationships between men and women and theological challenges that impact faith. “This is the God of Scripture, the God of forbearance, forgiveness, and unqualified love. We have been living in a world where we have viewed God and each other in a forensic way for too long, and it should be apparent that it is not working, and that it is not going to work.”¹² This is the constant tension of this individual, Jacob and also of the many who travel the terrain of what is known as Hip Hop, not to mention, all of humanity as well.

It is worth taking a look at these intersecting themes between hip hop and Jacob by reviewing some of the voices that have emerged from the Hip Hop scene within the past couple of decades from the writing of this paper.

Much of Hip Hop expression is that of coming in terms with one’s own existence. It is a constant reflection, Hip Hop is, on what life has been. Black Ice, the Spoken Word poet from Philadelphia pens a poem entitled the Lone Soldier. In it he describes a conversation between his father who referred to himself as the “lone soldier”. From his voice and delivery one could hear the sound of pain as he describes his father’s journey as a man and then in turn describes his own journey as a father to his daughter. This journey is challenged with parental conflict and stress. The parallel to notice is that unspoken, but implied conflict between Isaac and Rebekah send a sense of emotional

¹² Madeleine L’Engle, *The Genesis Trilogy. And it was good a stone for a pillow sold into Egypt.* (Waterbrook Press, Colorado Springs, 1983), 272.

challenge to Jacob and Esau just as warring parents send the same to their children leaving them hungry for meaningful, powerful, and significant relationships, by any means necessary in some cases. They, Isaac and Rebekah never seemed to be on the “same page” with each other in regards to the children. If Jacob were able to have a conversation with his father as he grew older he might explore the possibilities of he and his brother’s competition as not their own, but that of their parents.

It is interesting to note that in the six scenes the family is never together: in the first it is Isaac and Esau; in the second, Rebekah and Jacob; in the third, Isaac and Jacob; in the fourth, Isaac and Esau; in the fifth, Rebekah and Jacob; and in the sixth, Isaac and Jacob. In fact, Jacob and Esau never meet in the story; nor do Rebekah and Esau. In four of the six scenes we find the parent with his or her favorite son.”¹³

This competition could have very well began at conception. Black Ice performs these words:

My father always told me,
I’d understand when I got older,
This internal hurt of a lone soldier so,
Held firmly in my right arm with her head on my
Shoulder because the way she likes me to hold her,
That’s what I told her, speaking about my daughter
In order to save face because just before the embrace
And all the “I-love-yous” and “I miss yous”
She clearly let me know she had issues talking about
Daddy, where you been?
You see when two parents are not in conjunction,
A dysfunctional child is inevitable. See Mommy is
Not on time with Daddy and Daddy is not on time with Mommy
Then the child grows up off schedule.
And it’s incredible because
He [his father] always told me

¹³Allen P. Ross. *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*. (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 1996), 472

I'd understand when I got older
Why he used to call himself the lone soldier.¹⁴

In reading of Jacob it is clear that he is characterized as ambitious, power hungry, and misguided. Yet, before that he and his brother might be something other than clashing siblings. They may be products of their parent's dysfunction. As a result, they both grew up, loved by both parents for sure, but also set a part of unique and individual purposes that are not aligned or in sync. The postmodern issue and voice emerges, then, as a possible critique of the prior generation's priorities, strengths and weaknesses as well as judgment that the challenges, misguidance and burden experienced by Jacob and Esau is nothing short than a mirror of their parents unspoken war.

The New Testament: The Collision of Two Communities in John's Gospel

John's gospel is the fourth gospel written and arguably the youngest among the synoptic gospels. John is considered to be a "witness that is so simple and powerful that its influence on Christian consciousness is unsurpassed."¹⁵ John's gospel is written with a few clear emphasis throughout the document. A few Christological suggestions are that Christ was not only conceived with Mary but Christ comes from the beginning of time. It is worth noting that in John's gospel there is no nativity scene. Instead there is the Prologue that opens up the text with these words, "In the beginning, was God and the word was God and the word was with God." This is reminiscent of the Genesis opening, "in the beginning." Also, seemingly John espouses a couple of theological points around "believing", signs and a high Christology. "The signs should lead to belief and belief to

¹⁴ Black Ice. Performed on Def Poetry Jam on HBO, Season 3, episode 1, 2004.

¹⁵ Luke T. Johnson. *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*. (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1986), 469.

life is clear enough.”¹⁶ From a literary perspective, John also seems to write with a bit of disappointment with the Pharisees and refers to them as the Jews on many instances throughout the text. So, with that said, John’s Jesus has a different look than that of the Synoptic gospels. While in John Jesus’ ministry is situated in Judea and not Galilee, his ministry is for three years as opposed to the one and he was very much involved in festivals.

So, for John, “Jesus does three healings and one resuscitation. His actions are allied signs and have an obvious symbolic importance. In the mouth of Jesus we find none of the Synoptic parables although Jesus does use some “figures”. Most of all, Jesus is a monologist. Confrontations with his opponents become disputations in which not Jesus’ deeds so much as the claims implicit in them become the issue.”¹⁷

One other literary device unique to John’s gospel is his use of symbolism and almost everything represents something. “Individual persons represent others: Nicodemus stands for all teachers of the Jews, Martha for all believers, Thomas for all doubters.”

1 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus^[a] by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” ³ Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ^[b] ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is

¹⁶ Ibid, 472

¹⁷ Ibid, 473

flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.^[c] ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You^[d] must be born from above.'^[e] ⁸ The wind^[f] blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."⁹ Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

¹¹ "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you^[g] do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.^[h] ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.^[i] ¹⁸ John 3:1-12 (NRSV).

The first scene to look at is that of Nicodemus and Jesus. This scene takes up the entire third chapter of John and begins with the writer describing what time of day it is. Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night to have a conversation.

Nicodemus, is mentioned in John three different times. Nicodemus was a Pharisee who held a seat on the Sanhedrin Council. The two additional times that Nicodemus is mentioned is in chapter 7 when he openly defends Jesus with his colleagues in the Council at which time they retort by calling him out as a Galilean. Further, the last time he is mentioned is where he is actually assisting Joseph of Arimathea burying Jesus. Interestingly enough, John describes Joseph as a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus. (vs. 38) Along with Joseph, the writer points out Nicodemus. He reminds the reader that Nicodemus was the one who came to Jesus "by night", also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds."

¹⁸ The Harper Collins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, by the Society of Biblical Literature, 2006. Harper Collins, San Francisco.

These two verses give enormous clues to a secret community of disciples of Jesus in John's gospel. John's Jesus seems to detest this type of discipleship. There were folk who believed in Jesus, but to do so publicly challenged their place with the Temple and the religious authorities. To publically claim this Jesus and this type of Messiah was against all religious reason. It was dangerous and would include outcast from the religious authorities and for Pharisees it could include expulsion from the Temple. This is why the conversation with Nicodemus is so important in examining this secret community. First, John 3's narrative records Nicodemus as seeking Jesus out at night. John has a strict theology of the opposites of night and day. In John 1:5, the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness did not overcome it. In 9:2, Jesus says that he must work the works of his father, while it is day, for night comes and no one can work. In the fifth verse Jesus refers to himself as the light of the world. In the third chapter and nineteenth verse, Jesus recognizes that those who follow him are people of the light. In the same way, John highlights the darkness. In chapter twenty, verse one, Mary Magdalene runs to the tomb while it is "still night." Here, in Nicodemus, John again makes it a point to know that Nicodemus is approaching Jesus "at night." The implication is that this night-time visit is tainted with some spiritual dysfunction. This dysfunction will unravel itself throughout this nocturnal conversation.

Nicodemus begins to affirm Jesus, "We know that you are a teacher sent from God, for no one can do these things without God." Jesus replies in a suspect way. Jesus does not say, "thank you", "I am grateful for the compliment" or "I appreciate your kindness." Instead he begins to lecture him about being born again, as though he is not impressed by Nicodemus' compliment. This terminology puzzles Nicodemus. This puzzling is a

literary device John uses known as “misunderstandings.” Often, John portrays those conversing with Jesus as not being able to understand his nature of speech.

The misunderstandings of Jesus can be found in the 2nd chapter of John (NIV) where he says, “destroy this temple, and I will build it in three days”. The Pharisees could not comprehend how he could build in three days a temple that took year to build. He was not talking about the physical temple but that of his body. Another familiar example is when Jesus informs his disciples that Lazarus has “fallen asleep.” The disciples didn’t see the urgency or the need to go back to Bethany just because Lazarus was asleep. They didn’t realize that Jesus was speaking of Lazarus’ death and needed to return per the family’s request.

This type of misunderstanding is what Nicodemus is experiencing when Jesus speaks of him needing to be born again. With all the misunderstandings in John’s gospel the one being understood often asks a question that undergirds the misunderstanding. For Nicodemus, the question is, “how can one re-enter his mother’s womb to be born again.” The other matter worth noting in this dialogue is how Nicodemus approaches the question in the 2nd verse. “Teacher, we know you are a teacher sent from God. Equally, important is Jesus reply several verses later (11), “we speak what we know and testify what we have seen and you do not receive our witness.”

Both of these men, as far as one can see, are alone in this conversation, yet they are using the third person plural forms, “we” and “our.” When Nicodemus says “we” and when Jesus says, “we”, they are speaking of two different groups of people. The group Nicodemus is speaking of are the secret Christians. The group that Jesus is speaking of are those disciples that are open about their faith and their choice to follow Jesus.

This secret group takes on a more involved roll in the ninth chapter (NIV) with the healing of the blind man.

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3 Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. 4 We[a] must work the works of him who sent me[b] while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” 6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, 7 saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” 9 Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” 10 But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” 11 He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” 12 They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

Jesus takes time to heal the blind man but sends him into the Temple after he washes in the pool, for confirmation of the healing. Upon his arrival the temple launches an investigation on how the blind man receives his sight.

A lengthy conversation ensues with the Pharisees in which the blind man is affirming Jesus as the one who gave him his sight. “All I know is, I was blind, but now I see.” The blind man recalls similar words of Nicodemus, no one but one sent from God can do these things. “What interests the man’s interrogators is that all this took place on

the Sabbath.”¹⁹ After his public confession of Jesus, what happens to him, is what the secret Christians fear. He ends up being thrown out of the Temple followed by a few insults of his religious inadequacy to converse with them.

The next angle is achieved by the Pharisees attempt to interview his parents. They want to know whether their son was indeed born blind. They want to know, from their perspective how was he healed. The parents make clear and bold statements in reply. “Yes, he was born blind. No, we do not know how he was healed. No, we do not know who healed him.” John exposes the motive for their answers. They probably knew exactly how he was healed and who did it.²⁰ But, to confess Jesus publicly would require expulsion from the temple. In addition to denying their knowledge of how he was healed, the parents deflect the questions on the blind man so that they are relieved from answering, after all he is of age at this point. Thus, the parents retain their membership in the Temple and avoid an opportunity to confess the truth. (18-23). This confession of the blind man is very important for the Johannine Community as we see in verse 8:32 where Jesus encouraged those to “know the truth and the truth will set you free. I am the truth and the life and the way.” (14:6)

John wraps up his theological position in the remaining verses of the ninth chapter. The parallels to Postmodernity and even Hip Hop life are overwhelming. Firstly, Jesus seeks out this newly healed man after hearing that he had been thrown out of the temple. The irony is this man’s healing is a source of conflict for the temple as opposed to a source of reconciliation with the Temple. The temple seems uninterested in his healing.

¹⁹Herman Ridderbos. *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*. (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1997), 339.

²⁰Rudolf Bultmann. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. (The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1970), 329.

They however seem consumed with the how of his healing. Jesus by passes the temple and moves toward the more important matter, at least the more important matter for John's Jesus. This matter begs the question, "do you believe in the son of man?" The man replies, show him to me so that I may come to believe. In a very similar manner seen in the fourth chapter with the woman at the well, after a few experiences with Jesus, he then reveals himself, "the one to whom you speak, is he." His reply, is the confession that John seeks to secure from those who would follow Jesus as a disciple. The confession is simply, "I do believe." In this seven verse pericope, the word believe is used three times. The Hip Hop, on the street version of this, is "are you down." This willingness to stand firm and publically is critical to belief in Christ for John. John does not completely seem to write these secret Christians off, but gives them sojourn throughout his gospel. This may be an underlying hope that they will indeed come to believe as he calls for throughout his writing.

Nicodemus may not have enjoyed much respect by raw Hip Hop leaders and believers. Hip Hop is often a call to stand up for what is right even if that call is vulgar and seemingly disrespectful. Years, before Travon Martin, there were calls by the controversial group, Public enemy to fight the power. Spike Lee utilized this song in his film, Do the Right Thing, where themes of culture, interracial romance, inner-city conflict and police brutality were pursued. According to Public Enemy, systems of neighborhood oppression, which largely included unfair harassment by the police as well as African American profiling had to be challenged. Public Enemy was not very polite in this call to Fight the Power. Their lyrics were offensive, evoking anger among inner-city youth while calling for a ban of such music by its critiques, many of whom were the

parents and grandparents of inner city youth. In this way, a postmodern situation arises. Hip Hop challenged people to individually handle this battle in daily ways. While Martin Luther King, Jr. called for non-violence and peace, this voice of fight the power seems contrary to King's message, but it really is not. In order to change, power must be confronted.

In this way, Nicodemus would not have been a public enemy. He was too busy trying to support both causes of Christ as well as that of the public, or the Temple. He secretly, privately supported Christ' mission, but he openly and publically affirmed the standing and ruling of the Temple. The messianic work cannot be done without being born again, or as scholars have suggested being born from above. The emphasis of this salvific action is not the number of rebirth as in "again" but the location of rebirth as in "above." To be born from above is to be clear about whose side you are on, at least for the fourth evangelist.

In Hip Hop life, tons of poetry and rap is centered on fighting oppressive systems even if it means being outcaste by politicians, leaders and clergy. The intersecting places of this particular communal nuance in this community is that of loyalty to the one who is Christ which also means loyalty to the ones Christ comes to serve or to liberate. This kind of radical faith is espoused by Dr. James Cone who insists, that if one would be a Christian, he must either be the oppressed and side with the oppressed. Cone's theological demand is just as offensive to some as Public Enemies' lyrics are. It is impossible to do the Christian walk without a deep commitment stand for the blind man. His parents could not engage the Pharisees investigation without confessing that Jesus not only cured their son of his blindness but gave him spiritual sight, a sight that themselves

did not possess. They held their identity in the realm of community. These parents could not be public enemies any more than Nicodemus could. It was just too risky for them. It would call them to denounce the temple and the religion that they had come to love. Yet, they admired and was moved by the work of Jesus. This is what created the challenge for them. They wanted it both ways.

In Public Enemy's rap on *Fight the Power*, Chuck D, one of the group's artists describes this kind of loyal militancy by declaring his identity:²¹

I'm black proud and I'm proud
I'm ready and hyped, plus I'm amped
Most of my heroes don't appear on no stamps
Sample a look back you look and find
Nothing but rednecks for 400 years if you check.

Dr. David Rensberger, the prolific Johannine and New Testament Scholar sums up this community problem found in John's gospel. He prophetically returns to Nicodemus' dilemma, by stating "The choice that faced Nicodemus was whether or not to side, no longer in private but openly, with a specific oppressed group in his society – indeed, with those whom the members of his own rank and class, the people whose company he truly preferred, were oppressing. The situation is complicated of course by the secretly espoused sympathy with the persecuted group in question."²²

He goes on to say, "Nicodemus is to be found wherever one whose life is secure must face those whose life is insecure, or who struggle in the cause of God, and decide to say, "I am one of them." Only by this declaration can Nicodemus avoid complicity in

²¹ Public Enemy, *Fight the Power* released in June 1989 by Motown Records, Inc. New York.

²² David K. Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community*, 1988. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 115

their oppression. Nicodemus is most likely to show up somewhere in the dead of night and when he does he must hear of the Kingdom of God. But, he also must hear, we must hear, as we inevitably shall, that it is we who are Nicodemus-that a transformation is involved, one that comes from God but transpires before the world and shapes a new identity: You must be born again.”²³

Therefore, John can quietly and informally be considered the Hip Hop gospel that calls the secret Christians to stop hiding and “get real.”

²³ *ibid*, 115

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Since the beginning of the expansion of Christian faith there has been conflict and an emerging series of events that have sought to change culture and human and religious life. The church has often been the center of this cultural shifts as resistors or instigators. The first major split, known as the Great Schism of 1054 was over lay investiture and ended up creating the Western and the Eastern Church (Western being Catholic and the Eastern being Orthodox).

This schism began a string of readjustments, reconsiderations, splits, mergers, and redefining as the church had to continuously live in contexts that challenged its identity since the launch of the Christian faith found in the book of Acts. The church and even the world has always wrestled with its theology, its ethics, and its interpretation of Biblical texts, liturgical traditions and the order of clergy/priests.

Since the beginning, these movements of reconsideration have been sparked by an individual or a group of individuals who raised issues, problems, and challenges of what they believed to be so important that they were willing to live with the threat of ex-communication, strife, and upheaval in the life of the church and the world.

Shifting always seems to begin when someone considered a different way of interpreting faith in light of their sociological, anthropological, and existential

environment. There has always been a push from one generation to another to rediscover Christian life and how to be the church in the world.

Monasticism as a New Form of Postmodernity in the Middle Ages

Each time, a postmodern knee-jerk reaction occurred to the modern generation and thought system before it. One example is monasticism and mysticism, which began as a secluded way of seeking God and experiencing church. The mystic life was a way of seeking God without the headache and heartache of a wayward church and its politics. Many of these mystics mastered the contemplative life, often alone in deserts and secluded places. One of these major battles that the church was engulfed in was that of the focus of communion and as well as where the ultimate authority of the church lay. This disagreement created the split which would create the church of the West and the East.¹ One of the voices that emerge during this time was Augustine who reflected on the fall of Jerusalem, which was about 500 years before helping the church to get over the loss of the city and move toward the gain of the Holy City coming toward creation. This theology was introduced in his book, “the City of God”. Augustine’s thinking brought much definition to the church as it began to re-identify itself in the midst of great change. However, schism was imminent and new forms of faith expression developed.

Mysticism, which emphasized heavily on the spiritual connection of individual believers and served as a call to the church to renew its sacred engagement would soon grow into a more organized unit, largely in the Western Church. Not long after the Great

¹ Earle E. Cairns. *Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 198.

Schism (in the late Middle Ages) a newer form of Monasticism began to shift its focus and move in the city as opposed to staying secluded in desert regions. Many of these monastic groups were beggars in the city and also largely responsible for theology in the universities. A few to name are Franciscans, Dominicans and many of the Servites (of Mary). Franciscan monasticism, begun by Francis, (who grew up in a wealthy family and later converted), led his monks to take on vows of poverty. Dominicans were known as preachers often calling the church to repent for its hypocrisy. They often supported themselves by begging and as a result they were referred to as mendicant.² What is worth noting these monastic orders also grew as wealth grew in the city leaving a more obvious community of the poor? “They produced a new awakening in missionary work, and also penetrated the universities where they became the leaders of theology at the time.”³

Monasticism as a New Form of Postmodernity

This wave of new monasticism helped to enliven a scholastic emphasis and focus. However, there perhaps has not been a movement so profound and so impacting of Christian tradition as that of the Protestant Reformation, led by Martin Luther. It is worth noting that Martin Luther was a Catholic priest and a professor of theology and was always surrounded by youthful thinkers. Arguably, Martin Luther spawned a major shift in how to do church and how to do religion. To this day, Protestant clergy encourage their congregants to do their own reading of the Bible; they wear academic gowns as liturgical dress, and they have a strong emphasis on congregational singing and

²Justo Gonzales. *The Story of Christianity. Volume 1, The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*. (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1984), 301.

³Justo Gonzales. *Church History: An Essential Guide*. (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1996), 35.

in many cases have an extensive canon of hymns. Architecturally, and in stark contrast of Catholic sanctuaries, there are often no symbols, statues and religious icons decorating the sanctuary. In fact, the sanctuary is almost bare compared to Roman Catholic counterparts. These were some of the adjustments that Martin Luther brought to the Protestant faith and many churches that are still emerging have many of these tenets to their faith expressions.

Dr. Justo Gonzalez discusses how even this protestant reformation was surrounded by and preceded by various types of movements of reformation and not too distant was the development of the Americas and the ethical dilemma around the Spanish conquest as done by Christopher Columbus arrival to the new land.⁴

The Reformation centered on very significant changes that Luther wanted to bring forth to his ecclesiastical communities. One such switch was a liturgical move away from the sacrament being the central portion of the Mass to the Word and it being preached as the central focus of the worship experience. Speaking in terms of furniture, the move was from the table being the center to the podium or the ambo being the center. There were other central issues that Luther had with the Roman Catholic Church which seemed to give a fresh wind, or a postmodern abandonment of the unethical teachings of the church. The primary change in doctrine perhaps was the Soteriological re-ordering of how one comes to faith. This process does not begin with a gift to the priest, rather, it is God's grace that justifies the sinner and makes her eligible for the transformative engagement of the God-life. In addition to the differences in the matter of salvation, there were also practical changes including clergy being able to marry. This new and

⁴ Ibid, 72.

massive “protest” gave birth to the Lutheran Church, but was also prominent in a series of movements throughout the Western hemisphere, including the Anabaptist, Calvinist and Anglican movements which broke away from the Catholic church as well.

This was the sign of an emerging church. It was not just emerging it was abandoning its Mother church and creating newer communities with the potential to spread Christianity in even greater ways. This Reformation saw emerging voices to social change, religious oppression, and theological renewal throughout the world.

In addition to Germany, where a good deal of Luther’s work took place, there was also a revolution of sorts taking place in France under the direction of John Calvin. Zwingli began much of the conversation around such a theological departure from the conversation but Calvin’s work was so prominent that “Calvinism”, which gave way to the Presbyterian Church, became a strong theological movement alongside Lutheranism but different in several ways.

In England, Henry the VIII had a difficult time securing a divorce grant from the Pope and as a result he ends up divorcing the Catholic Church at which time he begins the Church of England.⁵ This reformation also observed seven sacraments but it did allow priests and bishops to marry. This was not so much of a theological reformation as much as it was a social reformation or even a political one at which time England declares independence from Catholicism and therefore establishes its own mother church. Interestingly enough, Henry the VIII was married to Mary Boleyn who was a Catholic and at his death she became the queen and angrily killed many Protestants until her death. Her step daughter, Elizabeth later becomes the long ruling and one of history’s most

⁵Justo Gonzalez. *Church History: An Essential Guide*. (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1996), 72.

popular queens and restores the Church of England and the protestant faith as the main religion in England.

Another critical development where seemingly all of these faith traditions have an opportunity to meet is in the new found land of the Americas. The Anglican Church is duplicated on American soil as the Episcopal Church. The Anabaptists become the Baptist Church. Also, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Reformists also take hold to the new land.

The quest to this new land was begun by the newly rising Spanish Empire under the rule of Ferdinand and Isabella. Christopher Columbus began colonizing Mexico in 1521. Colonization of West Africa and South America continued leading up to the colonization of America (North) in the 1600s. Part of the missionary goal and colonist work was to convert persons to the faith without regard to their own native religious expressions.

This period of the church's involvement in colonization included the native rulers to adhere to Christianity and if not slavery and or war were justified. In many cases, these native individuals didn't even understand this rule due to language challenges and therefore their perceived disobedience was more than enough justification to enslave or even kill. However, there were voices of "dissent and protest-voices declaring that the entire enterprise was evil, or at least it was being carried on in an unchristian way". Because this is a project involving Hip Hop culture, it is worth noting that in comparison, Hip Hop, and more specifically, Christian Hip Hop is not just pop culture. It is a willingness to raise issues, regardless of their dangerous backlash. It is an insistence on raising the issues even if these issues exist in the life of local congregations. In this way,

the early church had traces of individuals who were willing to raise questions no matter how dangerous, to produce social and religious change.

A History of Emergence in the Wesleyan/Methodist Tradition

About two years after Luther's reformation a young Anglican priest and his younger brother began a movement in the intellectual center of England, Oxford University. This campus ministry grew in intensity and numbers as they gathered on a regular basis. Seemingly, this group had a prescribed way of doing things or a method of doing things and before too long they were called Methodists. This was an emerging young adult ministry that was known for their fire and strict adherence to frequent observance of Holy Communion, fasting and prayer.

It is worth noticing that this new movement was seen as fanatical and highly emotional. It was harshly criticized as it was an emerging movement, something that people could not understand or grasp. These young revivalists brought a new reformation to the larger context of the Church, a reformation that they themselves would never imagine. They were not trying to create another church. In fact, when the movement spread to America and bishops were elected John Wesley was very concerned about this becoming just another run of the mill church without passion and Holy Spirit fire to do the work of faith.

John Wesley travelled to Georgia to "convert the Indians" and while he was there he had a brief relationship with Sophia Hopkey.⁶ This relationship turned sour as Wesley didn't fulfill his promise to marry her. She married another gentleman instead and upon

⁶ Richard P. Heitzenrater. *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*. (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1995), 68.

arriving for communion John Wesley would not serve her on the grounds that she lacked grace. She took him to court for this humiliating experience and Wesley decided to leave from what was quickly becoming a horrible experience altogether.

On his way back, the ship on which he was entered a very bad storm and he began to panic. He noticed an unnatural calmness of a few Moravian brothers during the storm. As he inquired about their calmness during such a life threatening storm they assured him they had faith and trust in God. This convicted Wesley and he felt he had no faith in God. He became converted while attending chapel services and began his movement of preaching in the field and organizing lay preachers to travel. During this time there were very high crime rates in some neighborhoods and many of the Anglican priest would not go in those neighborhoods to pay visits. To this day, in Methodist Conferences the question is often asked of ordinands, will you visit from house to house. Wesley insisted that his preachers be not afraid of the neighborhood or fearful of serving them.

This movement was brought to America by two leaders sent by John Wesley, Francis Asbury, and Thomas Coke. There was an African preacher, Harry Hoosier that did not know how to read but nevertheless drew hundreds to hear him preach whenever he preached. There were many outside Methodist revivals and according to some historians droves of men and women pleaded for God to save them at the sound of Methodist preachers. Methodist was an anti-slavery movement, however there were lingering racial issues that challenged the church and as a result led to various conflicts and emerging voices in newer generations.

One of the first such voices of challenge and ultimately abandonment was from that of Richard Allen who was a worshipper at St. John's Methodist Episcopal Church in

New York and upon being barred from taking communion and praying at the altar until after the white members were finished. When told they could not come now, Richard Allen took many of the black worshippers and they started their own church called the African Methodist Episcopal Church and he became the church's first bishop.

Another matter was that of the Methodist Schism of 1844, when Bishop James Osgood Andrews married a woman who inherited a slave from her uncle.⁷ This matter was brought to the floor of the General Conference and as a result the bishop in question was not reassigned to a conference and given leave for a year. This angered the white-southern constituency and as a result they withdrew from the ranks and created the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. By the year of 1844 there were three distinct Methodist denominations all over the issue of race; The Methodist Episcopal Church, The African Methodist Episcopal Church, The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In 1870, the ME Church, South authorized a forming conference for the black members and the Colored Methodist Church was formed in Memphis, Tennessee in 1870, later becoming the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in 1956.

It wasn't until 1939 that the M.E. Church and the M.E. Church, South merged creating the Methodist Church. The Methodist Church was composed of five geographical jurisdictions and one racial jurisdiction, known as the central jurisdiction. Again, this created several conflicts as the Central Jurisdiction acted alongside the other jurisdictions but not in conjunction with those jurisdictions. For example, the jurisdiction

⁷John G. McEllhenney. *United Methodism in America: A Compact History*. (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1992), 82

was the body that elected bishops for those regional areas. Amendment IX⁸ was created to allow annual conferences to withdraw from the central jurisdiction and merge with the white conferences. The last and most difficult conference to merge was the South Carolina Conference in 1972.⁹

In 1968, the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church merged in Ft. Knox, Texas establishing the United Methodist Church. This was a very difficult year for America in that racial tensions were at an all-time high. The Black constituency of this newly established church was very radical and insistent on racial justice. A new caucus was formed called Black Methodist for Church Renewal as a means for insuring racial equality in the newly formed church.

Further, it was a very violent year, as the 60s were in general. President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was killed in 1964, Malcolm X was killed in 1965 and in 1968, two months apart, Dr. Martin Luther King and the 1968 Democratic presidential candidate and brother of the late president, Robert Francis Kennedy was killed while on a campaign stop in Los Angeles. Riots ripped through cities and the rise of Black Power and pride were engaged.

The 1968 session of the Democratic Convention in Chicago became tumultuous. Ironically, the 1968 session of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church was just as challenging. There were protests, anger, and disruption on the conference floor.

⁸ James S. Thomas. *Methodism's Racial Dilemma: The Story of the Central Jurisdiction*. (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1992), 99

⁹ Ibid, 141

Music, Worship and Preaching in the African American Church and culture as Postmodernity

The African American Church developed as meetings where slaves gathered to hear news of the plantation, singing and preaching. Many slave masters required their slaves to attend church or some form of religious instruction and in the evening they community would gather away from the main house, often deep in the woods to have church. The Black Baptists and Methodists traced their origins back to England and sought to provide a place of Spiritual and Religious haven for the Negro population. From the Baptist Church, three conventions emerged. These conventions are the National Baptist Convention, USA, founded in 1895 and the other being the National Baptist Convention, America in 1915, and the Progressive National Baptist Convention in 1961. These conventions also lived through great experiences of transition, schism, and reformation as the prior movements prior discussed. Their issues centered on publishing matters and in the late 50s there were matters around leadership and legitimacy of votes. The establishment of the Progressive National Baptist Convention not only emerged from leadership issues and elections, often decided upon in court, but also the stand as it related to Civil Rights. Dr. J.H. Jackson did not urge the same kind of political strategy as was supported by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. As a result, the Progressive National Baptist Convention was formed.

The Methodist Church was not without its problems and threat of schism. By, 1956 there were several Methodist denominations formed throughout the United States. The first being Richard Allen who later started the African Methodist Episcopal Church

after not being delayed from praying and taking communion until the white congregants finished. He left St. George in Philadelphia in 1787. Also, in 1820, The Asbury and Zion Church of the Methodist Episcopal Church were stationed in New York. Many clergy left the Methodist Episcopal Church over a property issue and left Asbury and Zion Churches without a pastor from the ME Church. These congregations merged and later formed one congregation, held its own convening session and named the new found denomination African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. There were some tension between Richard Allen and the Zion Methodists to the point where they would not go in with the AME Church. In similar fashion, the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church was formed in 1870 by the Methodist Episcopal Church South. These are examples of how change, shifting, and reformation continued even in American in the nineteenth and twentieth Centuries.¹⁰

By the time of the 1930s, the Great Migration of African Americans from the South was in full effect and there were many African American congregations that were led by educated clergy in the North. “Thousands of new arrivals to the Black Belt offered dramatic opportunities for expanding the influence and prestige of existing congregations and the birth of new ones.”¹¹ Many of these churches were very orderly and in some cases resembled worship that was often seen in the white church. There were printed bulletins, grand organs, choirs that sang anthems, and in some cases rare occasions of verbal outbursts of praise and worship. These congregations took great pride in their educated and sophisticated ways. For these African American congregants,

¹⁰Mark A. Noll. *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 201.

¹¹Milton C. Sernett. *Bound for the Promised Land, African American Religion and the Great Migration*, (Durham: Duke Press, 1997), 157.

these elements of style and instrumentation were symbols of progressive movement forward.

When Thomas Dorsey came along, his music was rejected by the African American church with the exception of a few. His music was a sampling of Blues and jazz infused with lyrics he wrote usually around a testimony or some sacred message.¹² He traveled around the country introducing his music and the concept of gospel choirs to perform it. His signature piece, "Precious Lord" was made popular by Mahalia Jackson who brought a few of his pieces to life through recordings and concerts. Gospel artists began to push their voice into the worship experience. Much of this music was a continuation of the sacred music tradition but it was rejected by trained, church musicians and pastors.

This fusion between the secular and sacred continues a conversation that has attempted to emerge in every generation. As far as Dorsey, "the second conflictive concept is the idea of the sacred and secular in his life. The sacred and secular were a means of opportunistic inclusions."¹³

The evolution of music in the African American Religious Experience has grown from the Negro Spirituals to a modern day sampling of various forms of music genres merged with gospel, i.e., folk, acoustic, jazz, classical, pop, hip hop and rap, and instrumental.

Additionally, present day gospel music has become mainstream where 60% of its listeners are not affiliated with a local church. This emergence of a broader roll of sacred

¹²Timothy E. Fulop and Albert J. Raboteau. *African American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and culture*. (Routledge: New York, 1997), 392.

¹³Ibid, 392

music has stretched the Modern church's understanding of the roll of music in and out of the sanctuary.

This paper has attempted to review three periods of emerging experience and transformation throughout the history of the church. The first period examined was that of the Monastic movement which sought to escape the corruption and chaos of the institutional church and in turn build a faith path that was highly contemplative and spiritual.

Secondly, the Methodist movement that encountered slavery from several angles continued throughout its history pushing toward a movement of emergence.

Lastly, much of the music enjoyed in the African American sacred music experience was not warmly received at its inception and underwent a good deal of rejection and tension from the pastors and the ecclesiastical community toward leading gospel artists at that time such as Thomas Dorsey, Willie Mae Ford and Sally Martin.

There are four characteristics that can be drawn from such observations.

1. Often, postmodern movements are born out of frustration with institutional and authoritative control.
2. Postmodern Emergence often happens when historical events challenges the ethos, purpose and meaning of a body of people or political beliefs.
3. In the context of religious community, emergence often occurs within art form by re-examining the limitations and possibilities of religious expression. And lastly,
4. Postmodern emergence is often led by a leader or group of people who are committed to the change and transformation that they seek.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

To begin to consider a theology of preaching from my own practical and pastoral point of view I suggest that we consider the outstanding ground work that has been laid in offering a theological and systematic framework for this discussion in Mary Catherine Hilbert's monumental work *Naming Grace*. She makes the case that the systematic theological unfolding of the revelation of God as it concerns the preaching endeavor in the Modernist era of the early 1930s begins with Karl Barth's dialectic stand on the Word of God.

Karl Barth, the German theologian and Presbyterian pastor asserts early on that God is revealed in the Word of God and not human experience.¹ God cannot then be revealed in the midst of a creation that is flawed and sinful. God can only be encountered in the Holy or in the divine. For Barth, the Word of God has its place in the hands of the preacher. The Word of God is not a mutual conversation but it is the movement of God toward the listener. The Word of God does not rely on earthly material to bring it to life. The Word of God then, is a divine event imposing upon and interfering in human existence. Barth clearly makes the point that humanity is incapable of reaching God but

¹Mary Catherine Hilbert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination*, 1997. Continuum, New York, 20.

God has reached humanity by revealing God-self in the human embodiment of Jesus, the Christ. Jesus Christ, then, is the revelation of God and not human experience itself.²

Rudolph Bultmann, is challenged in affirming this position entirely and lends to a more anthropological involvement of the preaching and revelatory event. For Bultmann, God goes any and everywhere to reach, connect, and move the listener to a conversion experience. Therefore, God is not limited to a particular mode of revelation to make God's self-known to the one in need of conversion. Much of Bultmann's thinking is derived from Martin Heidegger's work on existentialism.³ For Bultmann, human experience is what prepares humanity for an encounter with God. It is in the midst of human experience that humanity encounters the living God. Bultmann suggests along with his existential influence, Heidegger, "that ultimate existential questions of human existence constitute the preunderstanding necessary for hearing and interpreting the gospel as a call to radical obedience, freedom, and trust."⁴ To continue this conversation Paul Tillich moves further away from Barth's theory by asserting that "theology and preaching must begin with the human experience." Paul Tillich's anthropological position allows the preacher to not only consider the human condition but to name it and know that in so naming it, way is given for the "eternal now" to occur. The salvific event occurs, then, with a keen sense of the anthropological experience of "reconciliation and reunion, creativity, meaning and hope".⁵

To continue and expand the preaching endeavor is to give audience to Karl Rahner who Dr. Hilbert suggests as the voice that leads us into the relationship between

² *Ibid*, 21.

³ Mary Catherine Hilbert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination*, 2003. Continuum: New York. 23.

⁴ *ibid*, 24.

⁵ *ibid*. 27.

preaching and a sacramental imagination. This relationship must be contrasted with the dialectic anthropological consideration that humanity is flawed and in a state of sin. The sacramental theological contribution is that humanity is structured so that it is capable of a divine “friendship” with God.⁶ The openness of humanity to receive and seek God in and of itself makes humanity eligible for this partnership by grace. Like Rahner, Bultmann also supported some of the existential realities of the human condition but not without seeing humanity as flawed but graced.⁷ “This relationship of creation and redemption is an ongoing relationship that seeks to always live in the reality that while sin has affected humanity it has not destroyed it.”

Edward Schillebeeckx brings attention to the preaching event as not just an event of words, rather an experience, tucked in the human condition. This is a sacramental engagement. This experience is that around table. “Jesus announced the reign of God not only in his teaching and preaching but also by inviting sinners and outcasts to the shared intimacy of table.”⁸ “Much of Jesus’ profound ministry was that of table. It was at the table when the Syrophenician woman was denied access only for her to boldly declare that she would do what she had to experience healing for her child, even if it were under the table. It was at the table where Zacchaeus was converted. It was at the table, of sorts where 5,000 people were fed. It was at the table, when perhaps the greatest sermon ever preached was proclaimed, “this is my body broken for you, this is my blood shed for you and for many”. It was at the table that two men on the road to Emmaus figured out who Jesus was having talked to him during the entire journey. Jesus was

⁶ *ibid.*, 31.

⁷ *ibid.*, 32

⁸ *ibid.*, 37

revealed at the table in the midst of conversation, dialogue, and ultimately renewal. This is also an insight into how preaching, beyond words, shapes community primarily community flawed, but graced.

Liberation theology continued to grow out of a systematic search to this fundamental question of human location and divine involvement. Elizabeth Johnson wrote the textbook of Feminist understanding of God in her book, "She who is". This suggests that God can indeed be seen from a female perspective.

Likewise, James Cone, in Black Liberation Theology argues that if salvation is to occur it is to be experienced by those who are oppressed for the role of Jesus was to come and set at liberty the oppressed which means that those who are oppressors are ineligible for this salvation unless they themselves vacate their identity and join in solidarity with the oppressed as did Jesus. (Ref)

Womanist thinkers such as Alice Walker, Jacqueline Grant, and Katie Geneva Cannon have continued this discourse of human experience as it is in the perspective and voice of African American women. These are not women who insist on deconstructing a dominant male culture, rather, highlighting their own role as it relates to the power struggles of black men, and white men manifested in the forms of violence, oppression, and sexism.

It is in this systematic development that I wish to add a theology for the urban youth, often, but not exclusively, urban male youth whose voice rise in an array of emotions and issues. I would like to suggest a view of God seen through the eyes of the urban experience. By, urban I mean that which is related to large inner-city life, activity, and dynamics. In short, I mean the city.

Hip Hop and Postmodernity

This framework of theological and cultural succession is a form of conversation that has been either built upon or against the voice before it, historically. This is to be the norm for Postmodernity of any era. Hip Hop culture is a conduit of postmodern culture because it is a culture that challenges the cultures before it. A few components of Hip Hop culture that may be seen as postmodern include:

1. A culture of questioning everything
2. A culture where truth is relevant
3. A culture where relationships seem more important than institutions
4. A culture that values storytelling; and
5. A culture of emotion and spirit (Hip Hop culture)⁹

Sociologically speaking, we can consider four phases of human experience that systematically go from a “High to an Awakening to an Unraveling and an ending with a Crisis Age”. These phases are referred to as “turnings” which is a social mood that changes each time the generational archetypes enter a new constellation. Each turning is roughly the length of a phase of life.¹⁰ The First Turning is referred to as a High as it is an upbeat era of strengthening institutions and weakening individualism. The Awakening turning is a passionate era of spiritual upheaval, when the civic order comes under attack

⁹Efrem Smith and Phil Jackson. *The Hip Hop Church. Connecting with the Movement Shaping our Culture.* IVP Publishing, Downers Grove, 2004. 103

¹⁰William Strauss and Neil Howe. *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy, What the Cycles of History Tell us About America’s Next Rendezvous with Destiny,* 1998. Broadway Books, New York, 124.

from a new values regime. The third turning is an unraveling, as in a downcast era of strengthening individualism and weakening institutions, when the old civic order decays and the new values regime implants. The Fourth Turning is a Crisis era in that it is an era of secular upheaval, when the values regime propels the replacement of the old civic order with a new one. Then, the cycle, also known as a saeculum repeats itself. The Hip Hop community was emerging during a Second Turning and is therefore an Awakening generation if we were to employ this sociological formula.

If this is so, then it is conceivable to think that each “turning” could very well employ a different sermonic form, style, and shape to address the emerging generations at the time. It is also easy to see, that in each congregation, in every age, there will always be at least three generations sitting in a congregation at any given time. While sermons could very well and forever be an introduction, three points, a poem or hymn as its conclusion, it may need to review its content or else run the risk of being disconnected and ultimately irrelevant to emerging generations like those of the Hip Hop community. To stretch this further, it is possible that a phase of Hip Hop has lived since the beginning of time, already. They lived with just a different sociological designation and may not have had its roots in music as has Hip Hop.

The generation that became the architects of Hip Hop Culture were born during the time of 1961 to 1981. This generation is referred to as the thirteenth generation by authors William Strauss and Neil Howe who suggest that this generation:

Survived a hurried childhood of divorce, latchkeys, open classrooms, devil child movies and a shift from G to R ratings. They came of age curtailing the earlier rise in youth crime, and fall into test scores –yet heard themselves denounced as so wild and stupid as to put *The Nation at Risk*. As young adults, maneuvering through a sexual battlescape of

AIDS and blighted courtship rituals, they date and marry cautiously. In jobs, they embrace risk and prefer free agency over loyal corporatism. From grunge to hip-hop, their splintery culture reveals a hardened edge. Politically, they lean toward pragmatism and non-affiliation and would rather volunteer than vote. Widely criticized as Xers or slackers, they inhabit a Reality Bites economy of declining young-adult living standards.¹¹

More specifically, those born between 1964 1981 are considered to have “ushered in the Consciousness Revolution which began with urban riots and campus fury, swelled alongside Vietnam War protests and a rebellious counter culture. It gave rise to feminist, environmental, and black power movements and to a steep rise in violent crime and family breakup.”¹²

This then, is seen as the sociological make up of much of the Hip Hop Community. Hip Hop is an awakening where young people are realizing that they have a voice and a power to raise questions. The religious community is not exempt from these questions that include: Why do we have to dress up going to church? Why do we have to sit in church as opposed to be the church? Why do we have to listen to sermons telling us how bad we are? Why is there so much shouting in service but very little behavior change among congregants? “Hip Hop makes the church face its commission to reach the unreached and connect with the disconnected. Hip Hop challenges the church to look risqué when reaching out to such people as former pimps, the way that Jesus and the apostle Paul reached out to sinners two thousand years ago.”¹³

¹¹ William Strauss and Neil Howe. *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy, What the Cycles of History Tell us About America's Next Rendezvous with Destiny*, 1998. Broadway Books, New York, 124.

¹² Strauss, *ibid.* 137

¹³ Kirk-Duggan, Cheryl and Marlon Hall. *Wake Up: Hip-Hop Christianity and the Black Church*, 120. Abingdon Press, 2012. Nashville.

Now that a framework for theological location and formation has been established as well as a sociological perspective on Hip Hop's placement in larger society and history, it is now possible to consider a theology informed by and out of the experience of the urban youth, young adult and adult community.

What is Hip Hop?

Hip hop was a term that was thrown around in the late seventies. "Hip Hop began as a "recorded medium in the late seventies and early eighties as a showcase for New York Black male working-class symbols, tropes, and signifiers. Almost all of the songs, clothes, attitudes, and purveyors of very early hip hop culture were about life in the streets and clubs of New York City for Black men. "¹⁴ Its beginning was starting to circulate in house parties that utilized music that later grew from house parties to large record deals and established a post soul culture with a newer music form called rap. Rap music was an emergence of youth response to neighborhood life, authority, frustration, and dynamics. Anger at the police, politicians, and women were often the subject of rap music. Many in the public were outraged at the radical departure of what could be considered sensible music that spoke of positive things like life, love, togetherness, and relationships. Rap music on the other hand was harsh, cruel, and disruptive. It was an accompaniment to an urban crisis of drug use, corruption, violence, and urban plight. It was filled with profanity and vulgar lyrics. Simultaneously, inner cities were coming to terms with a post-civil rights era and an aftermath of destruction from riots following the aftermath of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The main goal of the liberal

¹⁴Toure, *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness? What it means to be Black Now?* Free Press, Simon and Schuster, Inc., New York, 2011.

theological platform prior mentioned, especially those in the dialectic tradition, were to make it possible to be, in the words of Harry Emerson Fosdick, “for an intelligent modern to also be a serious Christian”.¹⁵

Therefore, I am suggesting that not only is it possible for one who was influenced and claimed by hip hop culture to be a serious Christian as well, but that a new hermeneutic can be derived from viewing text and preached Word from the angle of Hip Hop culture. Paul Tillich says, that the crisis of faith is a crisis of language and culture.

Many of those who reject the Word of God reject it because the way we say it is utterly meaningless to them. They know the dimension of the eternal but they cannot accept our names for it. If we cling to their words, we may doubt whether they have received a word from the Lord. If we meet them as persons, we know they have.”¹⁶ (Hilkert, 28)

It is important to recognize that Hip Hop, then is not just rapping that circulated in the eighties. It has blossomed to an entire culture of people in every race, on every continent and in every socio-economic class.

There were many sorts of Black people around New York-and around America-but “[classic] hip hop did not show them. Modern hip hop does: its identity politics are more complex. New York’s hegemony has given way to a national culture, and the language and performance of Blackness of MCs from Atlanta, New Orleans, Houston, Detroit, Chicago, L.A., and other cities is different than that of New Yorkers. There are many women in hip hop expressing identity through their own point of view (as opposed to in relation to what men think). And, quiet as it’s kept, there’s a national gay and lesbian hip hop

¹⁵Mary Catherine Hilker, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination*, 1997. Fortress Press

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 28.

underground scene, showing us how far hip hop has come from being a site for Black, male, working-class, hetero-normative identity.¹⁷ (Toure)

So, to further define the parameters of Hip Hop, we recognize that Hip Hop is about dance, art, expression, pain, love, racism, sexism, broken families, hard times, the search for God and overcoming. (Smith) Hip Hop then can be seen in not just rap, but Spoken Word Poetry, literature, political commentary, fashion, design, theatre, film and any other medium that continues the journey of awareness of one's story in context of larger society and community.

If there were an opportunity to consider a Hip Hop homiletic and or preaching kerygma it would then be to bring to voice those who are seeking a holistic, healthful, and authentic encounter with God and community through the preached Word. Because Postmodernity is a critique of the earlier Modernist generations, Hip Hop is then a form of a postmodern, post-civil rights movement and post-industrial age engagement. In fact, it is not just a critique but a conversation that is steeped in anger, abandonment, pain, sorrow, and discontentment with life, faith, and context. Hip Hop engages the pain that has been imposed upon by living in the neighborhood, be it a neighborhood in South Bronx, South East Washington, DC, Newark, New Jersey, or Japan or the Philippines. How then can we develop a theology of hip hop and from there a theology of preaching in the hip hop imagination? I propose that one place to start a conversation on Hip Hop theology is to study the historical Jesus. This possible theological journey is the attempt to see, experience and encounter God while living in the neighborhood, experiencing

¹⁷Toure, *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness? What it means to be Black Now?* Free Press, Simon and Schuster, Inc., New York, 2011.

neighborhood challenges, norms, ups, downs, and interactions. To employ a hip hop theology is to claim God's interest and desire to connect with the neighborhood, by "moving in the neighborhood". (Rev 21:22)

Can there be a Hip Hop Jesus?

God so loves this neighborhood, which has become global and not just geographical, that God sent God's son to it, to grow up in it, and die for it. Jesus instructs his disciples to return to the city, Jerusalem, and tarry and they shall receive power. He further chooses to travel through the city of Samaria, one that is known to be hostile to his ethnic type. While there he was able to connect and collaborate with a woman, who was recognized to have had five men or husbands, being married to none of them and yet offers her conversation, dialogue, and ultimately entrance to the family, the community of God. This is the Jesus that talks about a son leaving his father's house to do his own thing in the world. This son runs across hard times only to come back home to family drama with his older brother. In another instance Jesus comes across a neighborhood stoning of an adulterer where he challenges those throwing stones to drop their stones at the memory of their own sins. And if this were not enough, this is a Jesus who had issues with his home church on the day he served as liturgist according to Luke's gospel. Upon reading the text and announcing that the time had come for him this text to come to reality in him, he is thrust in a conflict that could have been deadly except it was not his time. This Jesus had religious struggles and challenges as he was tempted for forty days in the wilderness and while in the midst of the height of earthly assignment he pleads

with God to let this cup pass, only if He wanted. But, being a neighborhood soldier he offered a clause to God saying, “If it be your will”. Jesus even quotes Spoken Word poetry, the Psalms of his ancestor David, on a cross by offering, “My God, My God why hast thou forsaken me?” (Psalm 22). This is Hip Hop. Jesus is Hip Hop. By coming to the neighborhood, his salvific act of bringing good news to the poor, giving sight to the blind, setting the oppressed free (Luke 4:12) is done in the neighborhood, among the folk who were not yet reached by the synagogue. Jesus’ messianic act was then to empower disempowered people and bring them to an awakening of renewed identity, such as the Woman at the Well, Mary of Magdalen, Zacchaeus, the woman caught in adultery and even the man hanging out at the Pool of Bethesda in John’s gospel.

This Christological engagement can be the source of a theological position on hip hop as a quest to be whole in community. This Hip Hop Jesus was deeply immersed in the custom of his day. He attended weddings, funerals, went to synagogue, and had disciples whom at the conclusion of his earthly ministry he elevated to the position of friends according to John’s farewell discourses in the 15th chapter. He has this conversation with his “boys” and tells them that there is no greater love than this, “that a man lay down his life for his friends and you are my friends.” Yet, within this friendship circle, one would betray him, one would doubt him, another would deny him and many of them would flee out of fear during those hours of his crucifixion. This is evidence that Jesus had a close connection with his people, some of the same, would eventually desert him only to be brought back to him. Jesus even makes a special moment occur with his mother by making sure John, the disciple whom Jesus loved would care for his mother and not leave her abandoned in the neighborhood. The lesson is that these things occur

living in the hood. The opening song of the 1970s television show suggest that life in the neighborhood consists of Good Times especially when:

Anytime you meet a payment. – Good Times.
 Anytime you need a friend. – Good Times.
 Anytime you're out from under.
 Not getting hassled, not getting hustled.
 Keepin' your head above water.
 Making a wave when you can.
 Temporary layoffs. – Good Times.
 Easy credit rip offs. – Good Times.
 Scratchin' and surviving. – Good Times.
 Hangin' and a jiving. – Good Times.
 Ain't we got 'em. - Good Times!

This is what it was like in the neighborhood of the 1970s and in some cases the neighborhood of today. This is the world that Jesus came to, one village at a time, one conversation at a time, one person at a time. This could very well be a Messiah that connects with Hip Hop culture if for nothing else but to tell them, “follow me”. This Jesus becomes the alternative to hopelessness, abandonment, communal chaos, depression, and violence. There is nothing that the iconic Hip Hop rappers and performers, Tupac, Biggie Smalls, TI, Salt 'n Pepa, KRS One, Run DMC could school Jesus on when it came to living in the hood. He was there.

My fear is, if this Jesus is made to sit and stay put on the front pew of our churches across America then we run the risk of isolating him from the very people he came among us to reach, so that they may become sons and daughters of God. This Jesus must not be bound by that pew, rather dressed in plain clothes, sporting worn Air Force

One Tennis shoes and disheveled hair to say, “I whom you seek, am He.” Preaching must be willing to capture this Jesus as well.

Toward A Hip Hop Homiletic Theology

African preaching was the first public voice ever heard in the newly arriving enslaved African Americans in their own community. It was in back wood designated meetings where the gospel that Blacks heard in white churches were proclaimed and preached in their meetings. “From the moment they [slaves] were removed from their home village and tribal lands and chained in ships’ holds, their traditional belief systems and rituals of communication were all they had to depend on.”¹⁸

During the 1960s, in the height of the civil rights movement, one did not have to go far to find a preached Word on justice, liberation and freedom from an African American pulpit. In the 1970s a strong revivalist movement occurred in the church and many sermons were beginning to be recorded for national distribution especially, those of Rev. C. L. Franklin and Rev. B. W. Smith’s famous sermon, “Watch them Dogs”. Pulpit geniuses were clearly recognizable among the nation so much so that Ebony magazine once listed as an annual feature “Fifteen of the Greatest Black Preachers” article. Most of these preachers were scholastically in-depth, poetically gifted, or hermeneutically fascinating, if not all three. The preacher was also seen as a dual spokesperson. The preacher spoke on behalf of God but also spoke on behalf of congregants who were oppressed and burdened with the realities of slavery, Jim Crow Laws, and racism.

¹⁸Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas. *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to the Present*, 1. Norton, New York, 2010.

As of late, new voices of preachers have nationally come on the preaching scene, through media outlets and vendors with a message that speaks to individual liberation from toxic relationships and poor self-image. Preaching has evolved, naturally, since the eighteenth century. Today, preaching is in a slight challenge as the listening requirements, educational backgrounds and sociological experiences are vastly different, even within homogenous cultures. It is possible to preach an intoxicatingly amazing sermon in one setting while in another setting (of folk who look the same, talk the same as the first), that same sermon falls flat and uneventful.

Context is everything.

On Sunday morning, contexts either collide or come together. While in preaching conferences, workshops and seminary settings, the preaching experiences can be of enormous height emotionally and passionately. Most folk there have a great respect for the preached Word, the work that preachers put into the final product and the anointing bestowed upon that preacher. However, preaching in a context of cynical, critical, and frustrated listeners such as those who have been born into postmodernity can be a daunting task and a different sermonic product might be necessary. "Our quest, then, is for preaching that is more intentionally contextual in nature-that is, preaching which not only gives serious attention to the interpretation of biblical texts, but which gives equally serious attention to the interpretation of congregations and their sociocultural contexts...preaching which aims toward greater fittingness (in content, form and style) for a particular congregational gathering of hearers."¹⁹

¹⁹ Leonora Tubbs Tisdale. *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 32. Fortress Press, Minneapolis.

Yet, the influence of the black sermon continues to shape the world. If one would listen to comedians, actors and politicians and have a familiarity with black preaching, one could quickly hear how that person has been influenced by the black pulpit and sermon delivery so frequented by preachers. “Black Preaching is like the playing of an old Motown hit, no matter what the contemporary or popular genre is, old-school Black Preaching still moves the listener.”²⁰

However, if one is to have a conversation about a possible link between hip hop and preaching, it is worth mentioning that a hip hop sermon form, style and delivery could never replace the classic preaching forms of the church but could add a possible avenue for connecting with younger audiences who may already feel left out and excluded from the church’s interest and community.

Therefore, hip hop preaching would be that of capturing the voice, emotion, situation, and the dilemma of those who find themselves looking for a Holy connection with God. Hip Hop preaching must be as hard core, edgy, tension filled and “real” as life on the streets. This of course cannot be the whole of the African American sermon product, but it does need to be available to those who need to hear the Word from the perspective of urban community. Hip Hop Preaching won’t be, then, for every context. While hip hop is a large cultural phenomenon it is not inclusive of everyone directly. “Still hip hop fails to capture the full complexity of Black America-there are many Black identities not represented in and by hip-hop.”²¹

²⁰ Howard, Gregory. *Black Sacred Rhetoric: The Theology and Testimony of Religious Folk Talk*. 1. Border Stone Press, Memphis. 2010

²¹Toure, *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness? What it means to be Black Now?* Free Press, Simon and Schuster, Inc., New York, 2011. , Location 422, Kindle Edition.

I recognize that hip hop has significantly been a sojourner in my own life and feel it to be virtually impossible to preach outside of my own existential reality. Yet, everyone has not been so influenced or engaged in hip hop culture. However, everyone has a challenge, a fear, a desire, and a hope to see life differently than what it has to show so far in arenas of politics, justice, family, and education. If this hope is not for ourselves, we certainly have it for others, including those who sit under our voices on Sunday mornings. This is what it means to preach from a Hip Hop perspective.

A Hip Hop theologian must walk along those who raised radical questions of faith and liberation from the cultural bias of the text and the church's own practice of adherence toward dominant white society.

James Cone, in his monumental A Black Theology of Liberation suggests, in a radical way, that Christian theology is a theology of liberation. It is a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relation the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ."²² He goes on to say, "That there can be no Christian theology that is not identified unreservedly with those who are humiliated and abused. In fact, theology ceases to be a theology of the gospel when it fails to arise out of the community of the oppressed. For it is impossible to speak of the God of Israelite history, who is the God revealed in Jesus Christ, without recognizing that God is the God of and for those who labor and are over laden."²³

To expand this conversation of liberation, Sr. Elizabeth Johnson who writes, *She Who Is*, gives the feminist voice prominence in the up-to-that point male dominated

²² James H. Cone. *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 2nd ed., 1 Orbis Books, New York. 1986.

²³ Ibid, 1

theological perspective when she says, "...images of God as king, ruling lord, father, and master, along with linguistic references to God as "he" proliferate. When the belief that the biblical writings are the inspired word of God is added to this situation, and when the text is read in a literal manner, then the fact that these are also the words of historical, culture-bound human beings tends to slip from view. She continues her argument by saying, "revelation then becomes a brake on the articulation of divine mystery in the light of women's dignity".²⁴ She, too, like Hip Hop is raising awareness of the oppression of people, in this case women, by systems, be they religious or political. "The goal of feminist theology is not to become equals in an oppressive system, but to transform the system."²⁵

While this seems to be a resounding voice for women, it too finds its critique from Dr. Jacquelyn Grant who takes on much of feminism by quickly getting to the point of her issue. "Feminist theology is inadequate for two reasons: it is White and racist."²⁶ Dr. Grant begins the work of carving out even another voice emerging in the ranks of theological discourse, that voice, is that of the Black woman or the Womanist voice. She makes the distinction that "the life and times of Black women gives evidence of the fact that Black women and White women lived in two very different worlds. The biographies, auto biographies, and narratives reveal many of the stories of how Black women (and men) withstood the physical and psychological violence of slave existence." Seemingly, womanist theology is not a cry against patriarchal systems alone, but also against feminist systems that are just as destructive. Womanist theology is not an attack

²⁴ Johnson, Elizabeth. *She who is: The Mystery of God in Theological Feminine Discourse*. Crossroad, New York, 76-77

²⁵ Ibid, 32.

²⁶ Jacquelyn Grant. *White Woman's Christ, Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*. Scholars Press, Atlanta, 195.

on men, especially black men but an embracing of them while calling for justice.

“Womanist theology “separates themselves from the White Feminist theologians who ignore racism and join with Black men in the struggle against white supremacy in the church, the academy, and the society. The Blackness of their experience means that White women do not know what Black women know even though their gender is the same. Although womanists express solidarity with Black male theologians in the fight against White supremacy, they are feminists and therefore join with White feminists in the struggle against patriarchy, an evil as destructive to the freedom of the human community as racism. Womanist identity as women means that Black men do not know what Black women know even though their race is the same.”²⁷ This womanist perspective is also a form of raising awareness, which is a pathway to Hip Hop theology.

So, then to move towards a systematic theology of Hip Hop preaching is to acknowledge the line of the Wesleyan hymn (A Charge to Keep I Have) which is, “to serve the present age”. That is the preaching task, to speak to the present age in a way that is appealing, relevant and meaningful to those who hang on the cross asking one of two questions, “why don’t you save yourself if you are the Lord” or “Remember me when you come into your Kingdom?” Jesus couldn’t even die without being in the midst of a theological conversation between two dying thieves, raising questions. Both questions were clearly asked by ancient forerunners of Hip Hop.

²⁷ James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore. *Black Theology: a Documentary history*, volume two: 1980-1992. Orbis Books, New York, 1993.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The United Methodist Church is a denomination that is experiencing decline. As a common goal, it has decided to reach more people, more diverse people, and more young people. The average age of society is thirty-nine and the average age of the United Methodist Church is fifty-seven. Therefore, it is clear, that the United Methodist Church, along with most mainline protestant churches has a difficult time connecting with, reaching and keeping young adults in the pews and around the meeting tables.

Queen's Chapel United Methodist Church, located in Beltsville, Maryland, is an historical African American congregation, where the writer serves as the lead pastor. The congregation boasts of 146 years of ministry, service, and mission to the surrounding areas. The congregation is made up of five large families along with newer congregants that have joined within the last twenty years.

The congregation has a current average attendance of the principal worship service of four hundred people. It has a rich musical heritage. It is a congregation that has an active Sunday school and a significant outreach ministry.

Queen's Chapel is a congregation that has had three building projects, the last one taken place in 2011. This latest project included the addition of twelve thousand square feet, a Café, a new fellowship hall, and sanctuary that seats seven hundred people.

Some of the challenges that the congregation has faced includes growth. Growth has brought an influx of new people, which translates to new ideas, concepts, and

dynamics that often move away from the small congregation that once sat on the hill. At times, various congregants struggle moving about the congregation not knowing so many people that have settled there within the past three years. They often voice their longing for days gone by.

Another challenge is that some of the congregants, particularly the older ones, have a difficult time adjusting to newer worship styles including newer music, newer design sets, etc. Some of these challenges often cause a sense of conflict primarily among the young and the old. As a result, younger members tend to vent in frustration as they field the complaints of their older counter parts while the older members vent in frustration of their younger counterparts for not adapting the older ways of worship and congregational life. This tension creates a consistent challenge in the life of the church.

There have been various models that have been add-ons to the current congregational system of the older ways. This includes a new Hip Hop worship format known as “Radical Sunday”. The premise of this service is to revolutionize through the arts the need for reaching out to younger generations that are wanting a relevant and cultural experience that grants them access to God and faith in a way that is meaningful and useful to them.

The congregation, as a result has increased significantly the number of persons in their twenties and thirties in the worship experiences. From this growth, a need emerged to navigate a path to create a sermonic model that would connect and engage the young adult community in a way that would highlight their own experience with God as it is

lived out in the city. The writer has utilized the Hip Hop imagination as a means of connecting with the younger generations.

The writer grew up with the sounds revitalizing Hip Hop blasting from cities up North. While many equate Hip Hop with purely rap, Hip Hop is more than a music form. “Hip Hop is about dance, art, expression, pain, love, racism, sexism, broken families, hard times, the search for God and overcoming.”¹ Hip Hop is a lifestyle of expression, protest, and raising awareness about life in the urban environment. There are four basic elements of Hip Hop which include break dancing, graffiti, disc jockeying, and MCing (rap). Further, Hip Hop has grown to other form of expression including journalism, fashion, education, and spoken word poetry. In a lecture the writer heard from KRS-ONE he has added five other forms or elements of Hip Hop. These five are entrepreneurship, fashion, language, knowledge, and beat-mixing.

The primary function of Hip Hop as a subculture is to tell its story, or the story of those who adhere to the message of its music and writings. While the origin of Hip Hop music is found in the early seventies, it has evolved from one generation to another.

The writer was born in 1970 when Hip Hop was just beginning. By the time he reached teenage years, rap was emerging describing life in the inner-city which includes conflict with the police, parental and family challenges, and life on the streets and in the neighborhood. Sometimes, there would be rap music about loyalty, friendships in the neighborhood and tragedies of many kinds. This culture, Hip Hop, was engulfed in a war

¹ Efrem Smith and Phil Jackson, *The Hip-Hop Church*, 2005. IVP Books, Downers, 61.

of violence, drug abuse, illegal drug distribution, teenage pregnancy, crime, drive-by shootings, and gang warfare. During the 1980s, hundreds of young black men were being gunned down in major cities across the United States. The church seemed to struggle for an answer. Those who survived that sociological terror grew up into a much calmer sense of environment often wanting spiritual refuge from the past. One can see that Hip Hop is an ever evolving dynamic of cultural expression. There are three trajectories of Hip Hop:

The first began in the 1970s and went into the early 1980s and was generated by Afrika Bambaataa, Cold Crush Brothers, DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash, Kool Moe Dee, Kurtis Blow, Sugarhill Gang, Treacherous Three, and Ultramagnetic MCs. The gangsta rap part of this trajectory emerged from Compton, California, in 1989 and involved an outlaw script and a derriere-shaking beat. From the 1990s came the work of N.W.A., Schoolly D, Ice-T, and several others. The second trajectory, Hip Pop also known as Pop Hop, had risqué lyrics that at one time no black radio station would play. Some of these artists are Heavy D, Will Smith, LL Cool J, R Kelly, and Mary J. Blige. The Third trajectory, are more revolutionary, politically engaged and historically aware in their music, where they view themselves doing edutaining as opposed to entertainment. These artists include Tupac Shakur, Nas, OutKast, The Fugees, Mos Def, and Lauryn Hill.²

The writer himself, identifies with the third trajectory which is more edutainment than mere entertainment. The gift is, this writer has discovered that there are enormous parallels of Hip Hop life with the Biblical Story. There was so much substance from the

² Cheryl Kirk-Duggan and Marlon Hall, *Wake Up: Hip-Hop Christianity and the Black Church*, 2011. Abingdon Press, Nashville.

narrative of the Biblical text that it was highly possible to read the text and to preach the text with what the writer calls, the Hip Hop imagination.

The Biblical foundations paper offered toward this project reviewed how Jacob alone possessed significant life experiences that followers of Hip Hop could connect to. Jacob's life, comprised of deceiving a brother and a father, manipulated by a mother, on the run away from home, falling in love with a girl only to end up with someone else, deceived by his own uncle, and even a battle with God. The primary subjects of family, community life, romance, heart break, failure, and theological wrestling are very much present in not just Jacob's life, but Esau's, Adam and Eve's, Lot and his wife, Isaac and Rebekah, and in the New Testament, the dynamics experienced in the Johannine community, particularly around the tension between the secret Christians and the open believers.

There is then a Hip Hop angle through which a preacher can view a text and uncover meaning that is not judgmental to the listener but engaging to the listener and ultimately leading the listener to a fresh view and experience of a loving God who promises, that in spite of all the sin it is not enough to discontinue God's love.

Preaching

This is a project on preaching. This project will attempt to underline a new paradigm of homiletic engagement. African American preaching must begin to recognize the vast diversity that has among African Americans. No longer can the black church

rely on a mere deductive method or call and response, whooping or even Henry Mitchell's suggestion of a celebration model. For certain, the preaching context helps to determine what is the most effective preaching style and method. Yet, it is imperative that the diversity that is seen among the black community is also met from black pulpits. The writer is not suggesting that any sermonic style has to be replaced, however, the writer is suggesting that the preaching product of the Black church in particular and the Christian church in general must be built upon and added to.

In the same way Fred Craddock challenged the typical deductive preaching style in his thoughtful book *As One Without Authority*. He offered an antithesis to the modernist preaching model by offering a creative twist to the deductive preaching product. Craddock points out how in deductive models the main point is made first and then it is broken down.³

Craddock suggests that the deductive preaching method is more monologue than conversation and dialogue. Seemingly, this preaching style lets the listener know what he should learn from the message. As opposed to this method, Craddock offers an inductive sermonic method that is more conversational than authoritative. This preaching method as Craddock proposes is clearly postmodern in that it is a method that does not rely on authority but the common experience of preacher and listener.

While Fred Craddock has given a possible entrance into preaching from the Hip Hop imagination by utilizing inductive sermonic methods, it is worth noting a systematic

³ Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 2001. Chalice Press, St. Louis, MO, 46.

theology of preaching in the African American context and tradition. In addition to Craddock, Dr. Zack Eswine drives the point home a little more specific to the postmodern world. In his book, *Preaching to the Post-everything World*, he makes two things clear. One, that the sermon must be real. It must have a context of reality. The writer suggests that if Christian preaching will penetrate the hardened cold world then it must observe what Dr. Eswine refers to as the four expository pitfalls. These pitfalls are known as the expository ban, the expository mute, the expository equivocation, and the expository evictions.⁴ By an expository ban I refer to those aspects of reality that we tend to avoid or that are culturally forbidden to mention from the pulpit. Sexuality, emotions, famines, joys, tsunamis, celebrations, dreams, promiscuity, murders, crime victims, cancer survivors, and injustice are part of everyday life but we avoid them.⁵

Also, there is expository censoring. Dr. Eswine encourages the preacher to “identify those areas of reality that a preacher does not talk about and you will discover those spheres of reality that people are daily trying to navigate without the light of God's Word”.⁶ Expository muting is that of ignoring the text and never using it for various reasons. Expository evictions are those of ignoring the importance of geographical locations in the text to bring further meaning. These geographical locations, almost always mentioned in the text are very necessary to the meaning. These locations have ranged from a town square, at the pool, in the crowd, on the mountain, in Jerusalem, etc.

⁴ Zack Eswine, *Preaching to the Post-Everything World: Crafting the Biblical Sermons that Connect with our Culture*, 2008. Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 30.

⁵ *ibid.*, 30

⁶ Eswine, 32

The writer is attempting to draw a synthesis between the deductive, modernist, and traditional preaching that he has grown up hearing and ultimately learning to employ, and the vast need of a newer model to address postmodern audiences.

Postmoderns, particularly those of the Hip Hop community already come to the sermonic scene challenging the scene before the preacher gets up to preach. In *Preaching to Postmoderns*, Dr. Graham Johnston lists what postmoderns bring to the table. Some of these items include:

1. They're reacting to modernity and all its tenets.
2. They reject objective truth.
3. They're skeptical and suspicious of authority
4. They're like missing persons in search of a self and identity.
5. They've blurred morality
6. They continue to search for the transcendent
7. They're living in a media world unlike any other.
8. They'll engage in the knowing smirk.
9. They're on a quest for community
10. They live in a very material world.⁷

Dr. Henry Mitchell, under whom the writer studied, has written extensively on the art of Black preaching. His latest text book toward the subject is known as *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*. Dr. Mitchell suggests as sermonic model that begins with a behavioral purpose,⁸ or the question of what do you want the listeners to "do" following the sermon. He then includes as a conclusion the act of "celebration" with a familiar cadence, "I'm so glad", etc. For Dr. Mitchell, sermonic discourse ends with a celebration

⁷ Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty First Century Listener*, 2001. Baker books, Grand Rapid.

⁸ Henry Mitchell, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*, 1990. Abingdon Press, Nashville, 53.

of what God was doing in terms of good news. The celebration is when the preacher “takes emotion to its logical conclusion, with a finality of feelings that parallels a finality of action and ideas. Instead of winding down and taking a seat, the preacher-performer artist engaged in a final, triumph and or celebrative expression of the theme or the resolution of the conflict or issue.”⁹ In some circles, this celebration is done in a “whooping” format. Whooping is a rhythmic cadence often in a climatic form and accompanied instrumentally. It is one of the major call and response forms in the African American preaching genre.

Dr. Cleophus LaRue, who wrote *The Heart of Black Preaching* suggests that there are four distinctive elements to Black Preaching. These include a. strong biblical content; b. creative uses of language, c. appeal to emotions and, d. ministerial authority.¹⁰

Dr. Kenyatta Gilbert also offers a fresh perspective on the various types of preaching models within the African American tradition. He first offers and calls for a preaching model that includes three perspectives; the prophetic, the priestly, and the sage. The prophetic does the work of building up and tearing down. The priestly does the work of fostering community and the sage enables conversation through wisdom.¹¹

What the writer is then suggesting is that there can never be a replacement for the rich and dynamic models in the African American preaching tradition, however, there

⁹ Ibid., 61

¹⁰ Cleophus LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, 2000. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 10-13.

¹¹ Kenyatta Gilbert, *The Journey of African American Preaching*, 2011. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN 62.

needs to be an additional consideration for a sermonic method, delivery and genre for the often forgotten listeners sitting in the pews; the young adult community. Hip Hop can assist the preacher in preaching to the young adult population not only in the local congregation but also in the community by using an angle to reading and interpreting the text and the Hip Hop imagination that would make the sermonic product

“Many times while black adult church folks are very excited and all into the sermon, I see many black youth looking as if they would rather be hearing from a Hip Hop artist, someone who speaks more to the issues of their generation than some Reverend Can’t-Get-Passed-the-Civil-Rights Movement or Pastor Let’s-Get-Rich-Don’t-Get-Sick.”¹² From the perspective of millennials, the preacher’s personal story becomes a connector to the listeners and in fact the listeners require it from the preacher. Generation Xers to Millennials no longer want to be given an essay where the preacher assumes what’s going on in their world. Rather, they prefer a sermonic voice that emerges from their world. A voice that knows the pain and sting of life’s trials but have learned first-hand the role of God in this world is what postmoderns are wanting or desiring.

As a homiletic concern, this project attempts to create an effective model of preaching that is informed by the sociological, anthropological, and psychological imaginations that emerge out of the Hip Hop Community. Because Hip Hop is a cultural phenomenon with clear foundations and grounding in young urban life, it would be

¹² Efrem Smith, *The Hip-Hop Church*, 164.

helpful to pull out the deeper understanding of how anthropological thought from a theological perspective impacts the preaching moment. Further, it is also worth reviewing how sociology understands, interprets, and challenges the Hip Hop movement as a subculture in the urban environment and lastly, how psychology explains some of the behaviors that exist not only in the neighborhood but in the streets.

If one is to suggest that there is a possible homiletic angle to preach with the Hip Hop imagination, it is worth naming what that imagination is. The Hip Hop imagination is one that operates and exists out of an awareness of great issues, sensitivities, challenges, and experiences born out of the urban youth environment that grew largely in inner cities between 1965 and 1990. Hip Hop has evolved and continues to evolve as the neighborhoods shift, the social challenges change and as older dynamics transform into newer dynamics. Hip Hop, for example, has grown from mere rap sessions held in courtyards and basements. Hip Hop is now the very expression of young (and some older) urban life that is carried out in political commentary, journalism, fashion, art, music, dance, film, Spoken Word poetry, rap, disc jockeying, graffiti, and health awareness. Hip Hop is no longer just one thing, for just one type of person. All who grew up in the shadows of Hip Hop was affected by it one way or another. In this way, Hip Hop is a love affair of sorts. Dr. Ralph Watkins points this out in his literary work, *Hip Hop Redemption* by describing a scene in the movie *Brown Sugar*. “The movie opens with Sana Lathan’s character, Sidney Shaw, a journalist, asking the question, “So,

when did you fall in love with hip-hop?” Then a series of famous hip-hop personalities answer the question.”¹³

It is what seemed to cradle black youth by engaging in their story. This story was often defiantly told by frustrated youth who began to recognize the inequalities that existed in American life. These youth were experimenting writers that told their stories in rap, rhyme, and song. They were a reflective generation. Tupac is a perfect example of telling this story as he often painfully described his relationship with his mother, the torn friendships, and the challenges with love relationships as well. In Tupac’s piece called Pain, he laments,

My city's full of gang bangers and drive-bys,
Why do we die at an early age?
He was so young,
But still a victim of the 12 gauge,
My memories of a corpse,
Mind full of sick thoughts,
And I ain't goin' back to court,
So fuck what you thought,
I'm drinkin' Hennessey,
Runnin from my enemies,
Will I live to be 23?
There's so much pain.¹⁴

Some of Hip Hop is also derogatory, rude and obnoxiously loaded with venom and misogynistic language. Much of these harsh attacks are toward women, police,

¹³Ralph Basui Watkins, *Hip-Hop Redemption: Finding God in the rhythm and the rhyme*, 2011. Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 1.

¹⁴Tupac Shakur, Pain as performed on the Above the Rim Soundtrack for the movie “Above the Rim,” 1994. Deathrow Records.

authority, religion, and educational environments. Some suggested that Hip Hop is a contributor to the violence in the city which includes black on black crime, large numbers of school drop outs and promiscuous behavior.

This is Hip Hop. It is hard. It is often impolite. It can be rebellious to organized structures. It is a voice that cries for recognition, a listening audience, and a path out of the madness that has been ushered into the lives of young people. The list of difficulty grows out of scenarios such as absentee fathers, impoverished conditions, poor or infrequent opportunities for college, apathy, and hopelessness.

This is the environment that needs a Word from a God that understands the concepts of the Hip Hop life. An average flowery sermon that has no deep awareness of the anthropological struggle and location in the Hip Hop community will not be able to penetrate the wall that is built around the unwilling listener who is frustrated with the a sermonic product that has no connection to the real world. It is not enough to just list the negative results of living the life of urban youth. It is no longer enough to sermonically judge the youth as though they are not listening, or sitting in the pews wondering how God fits in their lives or more urgently, how do they fit in God's plan.

The writer argues that an angle of preaching from the Hip Hop imagination, needs to be included in the vast genres of Christian preaching, but also to the African American genres of preaching. Dr. Kenyatta Gilbert lists with great detail seven types of preachers that are common in the paradigm of African American Preaching. These include the

evangelist-moralist, the social activist, entrepreneurial agent, clerico-politician, rancher-pontiff, mystic-spiritualist, and social poet-technophile.¹⁵

The evangelist-moralist is concerned with an evangelistic approach leading to conversion; the social activist insists on congregational mobilization around moving the community toward social change; the clerico-politician often serves as pastor and in some cases as an elected official and preaches social justice messages similar to the social activist; the rancher-pontiff is often a pastor/preacher absorbed with his or her own methodology, preaching style and vision while often hiring out the other portions of pastoral ministry for the staff to handle; the mystic-spiritualist emphasizes a preaching motif from the place of spiritual development and formation and lastly, the social poet-technophile is the one who is technically savvy, up to date with social media trends and spends a good deal of time ministering to the culture and not just the church. Much of her ministry will be spend engaging in social and cultural criticism.¹⁶

The writer considers himself as a social-poet-technophile preacher who is convinced that the god who is omnipresent is also present in the world of Hip Hop. This is possible, because the Biblical text is loaded with “Hip Hop-Like” experiences that are more than enough substance to point a spotlight on how God uses the messiness of creation to bring about hope, redemption, and salvific possibilities.

The text is loaded with Biblical narrative that parallels as well as intersects Hip Hop life. A young couple that begins with everything, (yet that was not enough for them)

¹⁵ Gilbert, 133-135.

¹⁶ Gilbert, 139

and as a result ends up getting evicted from their “premises” due to poor management of their God-given resources. Also, a man who was put up for adoption, grows up to kill a man in defense of a native woman in the neighborhood and he ends up being called to the ministry as fugitive only to ironically lead a captive people to liberation. This is the Hip Hop imagination. Jacob, who falls in love with the first girl he sees at the town hang-out spot, the well, ends up tangled up with her sister in a family imposed triangle and lives for fourteen years in between two warring sisters and a deceptive uncle. This is clearly a sad family reality that can be traced into Hip Hop circles. David and Jonathan, two of the very closest of friends, finds their friendship threatened by a jealous, insecure person of authority who attempts to kill David, an attempt only thwarted by the son of the would be assassin is a thick Hip Hop situation underlying themes of friendship, loyalty, family allegiance and brotherly love.

Some would argue, that these life experiences can be found in any social arena of life or any subculture of American society. This is true. But, to be clear, Hip Hop is not just a social-pop culture phenomenon. Hip Hop is a social culture that is undergirded by the children of the Civil Rights leaders and movement, still working through the social ills of the new day and yet struggling to find identity in a larger culture and society. Hip Hop is a movement and not just a pop culture phenomenon.

Anthropology

According to the American Anthropology Association, anthropology is the study of human beings past and present. To understand the full sweep and complexity of cultures across all of human history, anthropology draws and builds upon knowledge from the social and biological sciences as well as the humanities and physical sciences.

From a theological perspective, anthropology is a study of humanity as it relates to God. When one reads from the Old Testament canon the story of Adam being made in God's image, yet flawed as he and Eve are so attracted to forbidden fruit that they disobey their Creator, one is reading an anthropological scenario. As a preacher approaches the sermonic moment, that preacher would need a deep sense of the anthropological relationship between the listener and God.

From a philosophical stand point, Plato wrestles with the question of who a being is. He begins this conversation with whether or not humanity is ultimately good or bad. Plato believes that there is an Eternal Forms or an Eternal Good. This abstract Good is what offers the world its natural inclination to the good. Because of this, *Anthropos*, or humanity is naturally good unless there is a disconnection with the eternal Good.¹⁷ This theory is known as Plato's Eternal Forms and in it he suggests that good and justice begins with the Mind or the One and in a top down way, or a vertical way, this good goes down until this good is experienced as bad and its downward destination ends up as

¹⁷ Diogenes Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, 1985. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 19.

worms below the ground. Therefore, Plato recognizes, that humanity is naturally good because of its connection to the eternal Good but it can also be tainted or ruined.

John Wesley's understanding of humanity is grounded in his doctrine of salvation. Humanity is on the run from God. God seeks to pull humanity to a place of awareness of grace. This prevenient grace is grace that seems to roam about like a heat seeking missile until it begins to pull on the subject. All arrival at the location of salvation is not because of a man or woman's goodness or attribute, rather, it is because God has invited them, has sought them, and has labored to bring them to an awareness of God.¹⁸

This proves, God's deep interest and desire to be in relationship with humanity. However, man/woman does have an opportunity to respond to God with a yes or a no to this awareness of God's grace. Humanity is invited to repent of their sins and respond to God.

From a Biblical perspective traces of anthropological understanding can also be drawn from four notions. The first of these notions is that man and woman are made in the image of God. "The fact that man is made in the image of God means that man is like God and represents God."

Secondly, God's image is distorted but Not Lost. Seemingly, despite the sin of humanity it wasn't enough to destroy the likeness of God that humanity shared. Even in I Corinthians 13, Paul attempts to sum up the ultimate of divine/human experience when "we only see dimly as in a foggy mirror, but when the perfect comes, we shall see, even

¹⁸ Thomas A. Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 1983. Abington Press, Nashville, 24-48, 126.

as we are seen.” This clearing up could also arguably be the restoration of this “fallen” state. Thirdly, Redemption in Christ seems to be more of a recovering of this fallen image. Fourthly, Christ’s return is a complete restoration of the image of God.¹⁹

Therefore, from an anthropological stand point, the person in the pew, is a person who is one that God deeply seeks after. According to Revelation, this is a God that is doing a new thing and is moving in the neighborhood. This is a God that is very much interested in the being known as man and woman. Therefore, when it comes to the homiletic approach, the sermon must have an anthropological element that will serve as the means to draw an individual

In conclusion, preaching from the Hip Hop imagination can be achieved by daring to expand homiletic theory (homiletics), entering the world of urban youth and young adults (cultural anthropology), engaging the culture, and reading the text with exegetical lens that parallel Hip Hop life (Sociology).

¹⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: an Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 1994. InterVarsity Press and Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 443.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Methodology

Hypothesis

This doctoral project will prove that a methodology of preaching from the Hip Hop imagination can provide an effective means of preaching to urban youth and young adults in a way that will engage the listener in a manner that will increase their appetite and desire to connect with God and Biblical Faith. The hypothesis is developed out of the sense of personal experience that his preaching and much of the preaching product of the Christian church in general and the African American church in particular is not inclusive of the anthropological or sociological locations of urban youth and young adults. As a result, this population is often unengaged in church and as a result are not having any connector elements within the preaching moment to the Christian faith and walk.

Field Experience

On January 13, 2015 two sermons were preached in the same night in Founder's Chapel of Queen's Chapel United Methodist Church. The sermons that were preached

were from two distinct styles, structures, but the same text, which was from Genesis 21. Both sermons were from the story of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, and Isaac. The first sermon was told as a deductive, modernist message while the second sermon was told as an inductive, poetic way.

The goal of the second sermon was to expand how imagery, poetic flow and a willingness to explore the location of a character that is often over looked in the text, Hagar. The first sermon, was to focus on the main characters of Abraham and Sarah. The Hip Hop Imagination was discovered in Hagar's voice and in her sense of injustice. There was more of a connector to the sense of Hagar's victimization in the second sermon than there was in the challenge between Abraham and Sarah over Sarah's choice to evict Hagar and her son.

The latest sermon was a deeper plunge into preaching from the Hip Hop Imagination. There was a conversation afterwards with a group of the same young adults. From the conversation it was clear that there was more of a connector, a stronger one than the first two.

Analysis

The compiled data is a compilation of responses a generic sermon evaluation model. There were particular questions however that were of major importance to the final results of the project. While this was not an exercise on delivery it was an exploration on how they generally were impacted by the sermons offered and where there

was more resonance with the message from an intellectual capacity as well as an emotional capacity.

From the analysis, the conclusions achieved are:

1. Both groups appreciated both sermon styles. However, both groups verbally affirmed in conversation afterwards that the first sermon would be far more appreciated by older audiences than by younger ones and the second one would be far more appreciated by younger audiences as opposed to older ones.
2. The issues in the both sermons seemed to be appreciated but the second sermon had more of a personal connection to the younger people of the group while even some of the older persons found resonance.
3. From conversation that emerged afterwards, some felt that the delivery was a major component to the sermon's power. The first sermon was a read manuscript. The second sermon was read but more of a personal tone.

Research Design

The research method used for this project is to do a qualitative analysis of surveying a diverse group of congregants who will listen to four sermons preached in two basic styles and methods and in so doing make the determining factor as to whether or not they resonate more with a sermon preached in a traditional, deductive way or whether they resonate with the sermon that is preached having been prepared by using the tools of the Hip Hop imagination.

Once each sermon is preached the research participants will fill out the survey. They will not be informed beforehand as to whether the sermon is preached from a

modernist or a postmodern location. Once the survey is filled out after each set of two sermons, an open discussion will occur to get a more in depth location of each listener in terms of how they were impacted by the message, if at all.

With the culmination of gathered data and conversation, the preacher will then have direction on how to impact and prepare sermon methodology.

The group that will assist the researcher in this project is the young adult Bible Study known as “Off the Hook” Bible Study. Off the Hook Bible Study is a Bible Study of young adults who gather under the three ethos statements of: no judgments, no limitations, and no inhibitions. Off the Hook is a postmodern based Bible Study in that no one is allowed to be judged regardless of dress, sexual orientation, living arrangements, or any other controversial religious scenarios. Secondly, there are no limitations on subject matter and conversation that may take place at Off the Hook Bible Study. Any one is allowed to ask or inquire about anything related to their life or concerns. Lastly, it is highly encouraging for persons to feel comfortable and at ease without feeling inhibited as may often be the case in church encounters.

Off the Hook Bible Study is also a well-read Bible Study and quite efficient at doing sermon analysis and critique. Some of the work that Off the Hook Bible Study has engaged has been from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Richard Niebuhr, James Cone, and Renita Weems.

The Bible Study is comprised of ages seventeen to sixty. Within the group is a former member of the Black Panthers, school teachers, college students, and high school students. Singles, married and dating young adults also participate.

Additionally, the invitation to join the listening group was extended to the congregation to increase the potential of balance among ages and gender. What is being sought, is initial reaction to two different ways of presenting a sermon substance wise. Also, there will be several interviews conducted with five young people from the age of 20-30, five interviews from older congregants aged above 60 and two pastors who preach on a regular basis.

Measurement

Once the data is collected and organized it will be displayed in a way where the researcher will be able to make various conclusions. The primary conclusions the researcher is looking for is “what is the phenomenology of reaction to each sermon preached in terms of style?”

The researcher is also looking to see what the level of engagement with the sermon was, which age group resonated with the sermon, and was the sermon a cerebral engagement or an emotional engagement, and which one would have more prompting to engage in discipleship.

These findings are important as the researcher prepared the sermons with a specific methodology using the Hip Hop Imagination. This Imagination utilizes postmodern theology, socio-anthropological analysis, psychological analysis, and strict adherence to detail without fear of exploring difficult subjects in the text.

Outcomes

1. Preaching with the Hip Hop Imagination can be achieved with clear attention to sermonic detail, keeping it real, and shedding light on overlooked passages or locations within the text.
2. Preaching from the Hip Hop imagination is not a young adult exclusive experience. People of all ages can gain appreciation from deeper details.

Sermon One

Question	Ages 20-40	41-59	60 and over	Unknown
Please circle the adjectives which describe your impressions of this preacher's manner	Caring Inspires Trust Knowledgeable Scholarly Sincere Reflective Gentle Energetic Emotionally charged	Inspires Sincere Quiet Knowledgeable Scholarly Engaging Emotionally subdued	Friendly Quiet Knowledgeable Scholarly Engaging Emotionally subdued	
INTRODUCTION				
Did the opening capture your attention? Yes No Comments	Yes=4 No=4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The style of story delivery did not capture my attention until the message came. Dry 	4=Yes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the description of Abraham & Sarah finally having a baby I always listen to the scripture reading 	3=Yes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only the title caught my attention. Gave a clear message 	1=No response
Did the introduction touch some need? Yes, directly Yes, Indirectly No Comments	Yes=1 Yes, indirectly=2 No=4 0=1	Yes, indirectly=2 Yes, directly=1 No=1	No=1 Yes, indirectly=1 No response=1	1=No response
Did it prepare your thinking for the sermon? Yes No Comments	Yes=5 No=2 No response=1	Yes=3 No=1	No=1 Yes=1 No response=1	No response=1
BODY				
Did the sermon have one central idea?	Yes=5 No response=3	Yes=1 No response=3	No response=3	No response=1

Yes No				
In 10-20 words, state the main message of this sermon as you heard it: (e.g., Humility is a key element of modeling Christ for non-believers.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sarah was caught up in a mess & don't doubt God, based on our thoughts, weariness, we created that mess but, God cleans it up for us & brings about redemption. The impossible made possible w/God (despite our blunders). God has a plan even when you think He doesn't. 	Obedience and trust God to be with you	God's plan is not necessarily your, but one should not give up.	
Were there any points, which were either unclear or unconvincing to you? Yes (please explain) No	Yes=1, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 90 year old lady with a baby No=3 No response=4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> points well elaborated 	No=1 No response=3	No=2 No response=1	No response=1
Question	Ages 20-40	41-59	60 and over	Unknown
Were there any illustrations which seemed not to fit or not to work? Yes (please explain) No	No=3 No response=5	No=1 No response=3	No=2 No response=1	No response=1
Were there any transitions that seemed rough or unexpected? Yes (please explain) No	Yes= 1, transition from the intro to the body was a bit confusing No=7	Yes=2, many didn't flow with the anticipated message; it went from the story to the points No=2	Yes=1, from point one to point three No=2	No=1
Would you like to comment on any exegetical points? Yes (please explain) No	Yes=5, not to rush God's will; clear message; clear understanding; There were 3 points during the end, they were clear to what the message meant. No=2 No response=1	Yes=1 No=1 No response=2	Yes=1, it was very clear No=2, only explained why this was only Sara's plan	No response=1
DELIVERY:				
Please circle any of the following areas of delivery you would like to bring to the				

preacher's attention and either compliment or constructively critique them.				
Eye contact	Maintain more; not much; none No response=1, Positive=3 Negative=1	Poor; minimal Positive=2	Very little No response=1 Negative=1	No response=1
Voice (clarity, variety)	down towards podium non projection into audience; generic voice Positive =6	Flat, monotone, without emphasis Positive=2	Quiet No response=1 Positive=1	No response=1
Pacing/use of pauses	No response=2 Positive=4 Neutral Negative=1	Positive=1 No response=3	Not always fit; Too slow; not many	No response=1
Wording (correctness, grammar, colorfulness)	No response=1 Positive=4 Not so colorful Negative=1 Monotone but interesting	Positive=3 No response=1	No response=2 Lacked color	No response=1
Posture/body language	Not engaging; stiff; no movement; leaning over podium showed lack of interest. Positive=1 Negative =2 No response=1	Stayed in one place; lazy No response=2	Reaching but yet boring Positive=1 No response=1	No response=1
Gestures	Minimal; no gestures; none; No response=2 Negative=2 Positive=1	No response=3 None	Nothing to catch my attention Positive=1 None	No response=1
Question	Ages 20-40	41-59	60 and over	Unknown
Facial expressions	None, minimal Positive=2 Negative=3	Positive=1 No passion No response=2	Straight Positive=1 Expressionless	No response=1
Distracting habits	None No response=1 Positive=3 Negative=3	None No response=3	No response=2 None	No response=1
Use of humor	Minimal but apparent Negative=111 Positive=2 None	None; No humor; seemed serious No response=2	None No response=2	No response=1
CONCLUSION:				
Was the conclusion an effective climax to the sermon? Yes (please explain) No	No response=2 Yes=4 • The conclusion did make the rest of the message make	Yes=1, Trust God No=1, no inflection No response=2	No response=2 Yes=1, sums up entire purpose	No response=1

	sense. • Relate - yes, applicable-no, knowledge-yes • Increased knowledge, caused me to reflect No=1			
Was the sermon successful in the following: (helpful comments would be appreciated) Yes (please explain) No				
-being relevant and applicable to your life	No=1 Yes=7	No=1 Yes=2 No response=1	No=1 Yes=2	Yes=1
-increasing your knowledge	No=5 Yes=3	No=1 Yes=3	No=2 Yes=1	No=1
-causing a change in your attitude	No=2 Yes=6	No=3 Yes=1, Don't worry, but always trust	No=2 Yes=1	No=1
-likely causing a change in your behavior	No=1 Yes=6 No response=1	No=1 Yes=1 No response=1	No=2 Yes=1	No=1
Did the sermon contain enough creativity and/or personal connectedness to hold your interest for the entire message? Yes No (Please comment)	No=3 Yes=2 No response=2	No=1, delivery with no passion Yes=1	No=2 No response=1	Yes=1
Additional comments on the Conclusion Including Suggested Areas for Improvement:	Older Adults=6 Middle Age to Older=1 No response=1	Older Adults=2 Younger & older=1 No response=1	Older Adults=1 Younger & Older=1 Younger=1 For someone younger in life who wants to learn and understand	Younger & older=1
What aspect of the sermon (e.g., major point, story, or technique) are you most likely to remember the longest?	Don't doubt God; story No response=6	No response=4	No response=3	No response=1
Question	Ages 20-40	41-59	60 and over	Unknown
Overall, I would evaluate this sermon as:				
A good effort but the final result still needs some work.	No response=8	No response=4	No response=2 Yes=1	No response=1
Adequate in most ways. Shows promise.	Yes=2 No response=6	No response=3 Yes=1	No response=3	No response=1
Adequate in every way. Well done.	No response=8	No response=3 Yes=1	No response=3	No response=1

Outstanding. Clearly an area of giftedness.	No response=8	No response=4	No response=3	No response=1
Did this sermon resonate with your being? Yes or No	Yes=6 No=1 No response=1	Yes=3 NO=1	Yes=1 No=2	Yes=1
Did this sermon have more presence in your mind or heart? Mental or emotional	No response=1 Mental=4 Mental/emotional=1 Emotional=2	Emotional=2 Mental=2	Mental=1 Emotional=2	Emotional=1
Were you able to gain points of interest from this sermon? Yes or No	No=2 Yes=5 No response=1	Yes=3 No=1	Yes=3	Yes=1

Sermon Two

Question	Ages 20-40	41-59	60 and over	Unknown
Please circle the adjectives which describe your impressions of this preacher's manner:	Friendly Caring Inspires Trust Sincere Energetic Emotionally charged Quiet Knowledgeable Engaging	Energetic Emotionally charged Engaging Reflective Confident Powerful Responsive to audience	Engaging Emotionally subdued Reflective Confident Powerful	
INTRODUCTION				
Did the opening capture your attention? Yes No Comments	Yes=5 No=3	Yes=1 No=3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was a little lost in the beginning No intro Not as direct as #1 	Yes=3 Tone of voice captured my attention right away	
Did the introduction touch some need? Yes, directly Yes, Indirectly No Comments	No=2 Yes, directly=4, Only because I'm dealing with love hate issues in my own life. Yes, indirectly=1 No response=1	Yes, indirectly=2 Yes, directly=1 No response=1 Beginning of sermon.	Yes, directly=3 Even without intro	
Did it prepare your thinking for the sermon? Yes No	No=2 Yes=6 Seemed more real than the other.	No=1 No response=1 Yes=2	Yes=3	
BODY				

Did the sermon have one central idea? Yes No	Yes=4, hate, anger No response=4	Yes=2 No response=2	No response=2 Yes=1	
In 10-20 words, state the main message of this sermon as you heard it: (e.g., Humility is a key element of modeling Christ for non-believers.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slave girl, self-hatred, God allows things to happen even when we don't understand, but he hears the cry of His children. Don't focus on hate--focus on the love because you may miss what Jesus has in store for you. 	The feeling of one woman to the other	Love will win over hate power hate. Wait for the Lord.	
Were there any points, which were either unclear or unconvincing to you? Yes (please explain) No	No=3 No response=5	No=2 No response=2	No=2 No response=1	
Were there any illustrations which seemed not to fit or not to work? Yes (please explain) No	No=3 No response=5 The first sermon didn't have many illustrations. This one took me right there.	No=1 No response=3	No=2 No response=1	
Question	Ages 20-40	41-59	60 and over	Unknown
Were there any transitions that seemed rough or unexpected? Yes (please explain) No	Yes=2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes, hate being able to transition into love Yes, towards the beginning it was clear it was being read No, the pauses gave room for digestion No=5 No response=1	No=4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No, each point was emphasized No, had a cohesive theme, phase that was repeated and made it smooth. 	Yes=1 No=2 They flowed together.	
Would you like to comment on any exegetical points? Yes (please explain) No	No=3 No response=4	No response=4	Yes=1 No response=3	
DELIVERY				
Please circle any of the following areas of delivery you would like to bring to the preacher's attention and either compliment or constructively critique them.				

Eye contact	No response=4 Positive=1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The delivery was good and seemed more animated than the first sermon. Very little, much more 	Positive=1 No response=3	Yes, plenty No response=2	
Voice (clarity, variety)	No response=6 Positive=1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Louder & clearer than the first one. 	No response=2 Had a cadence, almost spoken word type	No response=3	
Pacing/use of pauses	Positive=2 No response=5 Lack of	Positive=1 No response=3	No response=3	
Wording (correctness, grammar, colorfulness)	Negative=1 No response=5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More than the first Correctness Created imagery colorful descriptive Liked the spoken word type of the sermon was deep 	No response=4 This should have been held onstage in the café. Spoken word in a church setting...	No response=3	
Posture/body language	Yes, relaxed, stood up No response=6	No response=4	No response=3	
Gestures	Positive=1 No response=6 Yes, makes it more interesting	No response=4	No response=3	
Facial expressions	Positive=1 Yes=1 showed hate and love, longing No response=6	Positive=1 No response=3	No response=3	
Question	Ages 20-40	41-59	60 and over	Unknown
Distracting habits	Positive=1 No response=6 Didn't lean over the podium like the first one	No response=4	No response=3	
Use of humor	Negative=1 No response=5	No response=3 None	No response=3 Less humor	

	Minimal		showed the seriousness of the story	
CONCLUSION:				
Was the conclusion an effective climax to the sermon? Yes (please explain) No	Yes=2, because the terms love and hate and then how you pulled it together to remind us to focus on the love & not hate to be blessed by God No response=5	Yes=1 This is a sermon that would apply to younger people; they get the hip hop type delivery. No response=3	Yes=3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Powerful • Brought home the message of love and hate that Hagar should have felt & didn't. 	
Was the sermon successful in the following: (helpful comments would be appreciated) Yes (please explain) No				
-being relevant and applicable to your life	Yes=7 Love & hate situations in music like a rap song I know No response=1	Yes=4	Yes=3	
-increasing your knowledge	No=2 No response=1	Yes=4	Yes=3	
-causing a change in your attitude	Yes=6 No response=2	Yes=4	Yes=2 No response=1	
-likely causing a change in your behavior	Yes=6 No response=2	Yes=4	Yes=2 No response=1	
Did the sermon contain enough creativity and/or personal connectedness to hold your interest for the entire message? Yes No (Please comment)	Yes=2 No response=6	Yes=2 No response=2	Yes=3	
Additional comments on the Conclusion Including Suggested Areas for Improvement:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, relevant, applicable. Younger & older • applies to older & younger • but I think an older would get it 	This kind of delivery I think would be for younger adults but I could relate.	Both age groupings would find same thing look at and relating to	
What aspect of the sermon (e.g., major point, story, or technique) are you most likely to remember the longest?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love is stronger than hate. • No time to hate. 	Do not let hate consume you so you miss your blessing	Never follow your emotions when they are leading to hate	
Overall, I would evaluate this sermon as:				
A good effort but the final result still needs some work.	No response=8	No response=4	No response=3	

Adequate in most ways. Shows promise.	Yes=1 No response=7	No response=4	No response=3	
Question	Ages 20-40	41-59	60 and over	Unknown
Adequate in every way. Well done.	Yes=4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The delivery was down; Pastor described the characters so well, that you could see and almost feel the pain that Hagar & Abraham felt No response 4	Yes=1 No response=3	Yes=1 No response=2	
Outstanding. Clearly an area of giftedness.	No response=7 Felt like I was in a spoken word venue, an experience with a Godly story told with so much imagery.	No response=3 Yes, amazing way he took this serious plan of Sarah's and made it work for a group of people who are into spoken word.	Yes, totally loved how descriptive and colorful this story could be as I began to put myself in Hagar's place...hate No response=2	
Did this sermon resonate with your being? Yes or No	Yes=7 No=1	Yes=4	Yes=3	
Did this sermon have more presence in your mind or heart? Mental or emotional	Mental=3 Mental & emotional=1	Emotional=3 Mental=1	Emotional & mental=1 Emotional=2	
Were you able to gain points of interest from this sermon? Yes or No	Yes=7 No=1	Yes=4	Yes=3	

Compilation of Interviews

Interview Questions with a female, 30 year old spoken word artist out of Baltimore, MD who is not often in attendance to church, but has a Seventh Day Adventist Background. Her stage name is Love the Poet and she has given me permission to use her Identity in this project. She has written several poems on her frustration with the church, theology, and LGBTQ issues.

1. What do you need from preaching?

When I go to church I want a sermon that speaks to social change as much as my poetry does. This is why I do poetry, which is a form of preaching in and of itself. I think the world is thirsty for words that address the real issues and sometimes church just can't provide that venue as the preacher must be polite. So, I wish I could hear sermons that relate to me and so many of my friends in terms.

2. How often do you hear the type of sermons you think or feel that you need?
Not very often.

3. In what ways do you feel that the sermonic message and experience will impact you to feel God?

I feel that God is love. I feel that God loves me even though his people don't very much. I've been hurt by the church so many times that I just want a sermon that levels the playing field.

4. Do you like the preacher to use personal stories or generic ones?

I think both can be effective when used effectively. They just have to be authentic.

5. Do you like the preacher utilizing social and secular devices such as music, sayings, lingo, etc? Definitely. You know I'm down with that. We've talked about that numerous times.

Second Interview with an undisclosed male who is 34, a lover of Hip Hop music and a former Jehovah's Witness.

1. What do you need from preaching?

I need a sermon that will actually teach me something. I think about God all day, every day and as a result I need those thoughts met with what I'm thinking.

2. So do you need any emotional involvement?

Not really.

3. How often do you hear the type of sermons you think or feel that you need?

You be breaking it down Rev and that's what I like. So, I get a good dose of it all the time.

4. In what ways do you feel that the sermonic message and experience will impact you to feel God?

It just does. Every time I walk in the doors I feel God. The sermons help me want to feel Him even more.

5. Do you like the preacher to use personal stories or generic ones?

Definitely. I need to hear a preacher I can relate to.

6. Do you like the preacher utilizing social and secular devices such as music, sayings, lingo, etc.?

That's even better, for sure.

Third Interview, a 36 year old male from London, England by way of Ghana, West Africa.

1. What do you need from preaching?

I need a reminder every week as to how I must be an active disciple for God.

2. How often do you hear the type of sermons you think or feel that you need?

I am open to various types of preaching. Not just one type.

3. In what ways do you feel that the sermonic message and experience will impact you to feel God?

I feel God when the story in the Bible proves his love and his care for the world. Where I come from I've seen very bad things that have caused me to wonder if there is a God. But, I know there is and I need the preacher to know it too.

4. Do you like the preacher to use personal stories or generic ones?

Yes, it takes the pressure off of me feeling like I'm sticking out.

5. Do you like the preacher utilizing social and secular devices such as music, sayings, lingo, etc.?

I'm okay with it.

Fifth Interview, 17 year old male youth, high school senior

1. What do you need from preaching?

I need a good story and I'm cool with it. I'm new to church so I don't really know.

2. How often do you hear the type of sermons you think or feel that you need?

All the time. I can understand your sermons very easy. It holds my attention.

3. In what ways do you feel that the sermonic message and experience will impact you to feel God?

I'm not sure I feel God but I know I feel something. I feel that God is wanting me to do something.

4. Do you like the preacher to use personal stories or generic ones?

I actually like the personal stories. Helps me think you are real.

5. Do you like the preacher utilizing social and secular devices such as music, sayings, lingo, etc.?

I'm okay, but some of the ones you use are old and I'm not too familiar with them. No offense Pastor!

Reflections, summary, and conclusions

Hip Hop is about knowing oneself. The term “hip” is slang for being informed or aware of something. When someone says, “I’m hip”, he or she means to say, that I am conscious or aware of some form of information. To hop is to move about, to be mobile and to engage in motion. Hip Hop is awareness in motion. It is to always be thinking, discovering, and moving. Jacob experienced this in Genesis when he dislocated his “hip” but lived with a “hop” for the rest of his life. He had become hip in that wrestling match with divinity that the only blessings he ever sought or needed could only be provided for by God. His determination to be blessed was the result of becoming “hip” on who God is and what God can do.

This project has assisted the writer in finding his own voice as a preacher. Jesus says, to follow him one must take up their cross, deny themselves and follow. This project was an exercise in discovering the actual self to be denied in the gospel preaching endeavor. A world of homiletic possibility is now available to the preacher as he discovers a methodology of homiletics that is not always neat, structured and orderly. Sometimes, it is just as sloppy as life itself, however, if the methodology follows certain guidelines that pull out the difficulty of life, then it is possible to achieve a sermonic experience that can penetrate the world of the listener and transport them to the presence of God.

Throughout the writer’s ministry there has been conflict in staying true to the sermonic methodology in which he was taught and the desire to create his own sermon methodology albeit informed by older methodologies. The writer has struggled with how to preach to congregations accustomed to deductive style preaching but had considerable

ease preaching in inductive ways. Preaching includes how to construct a sermon, how to deliver one and how to do it in such a way that causes a reaction. This project has enabled me to do just that.

One can preach with the Hip Hop Imagination if one will enter the world of the text and behind the text, to pay special attention to overlooked characters, spaces, smells, emotions and moods. To preach with the Hip Hop and postmodern imagination is also to uncover the systems that oppress people religiously and find the freedom that is offered to the oppressed through anthropological, sociological and psychological inspection. The anthropological question is “what is happening with people, individually?” Sociology asks the question, “What is happening to people in community?”. The psychological question is “what is motivating this particular behavior, i.e., fear, jealousy, anger, sadness, confusion, etc.

When these are considered, it becomes easier to preach with a Hip Hop Imagination.

From the Project several things have been realized and learned:

1. The effectiveness of a particular preaching style is not totally dependent on its structure or its form. Rather it's dependent on the Preaching Elements of Hip Hop.
2. To preach with the Hip Hop Imagination can be done in any genre, not just inductive.
3. To preach with the Hip Hop Imagination requires attentiveness to the Preaching Elements of a. is it real; b. does it have a sense of scandal to it; c. are their

intersections drawn between all the narrative elements in the text, as in emotions, locations, facial expressions and socio-anthropological and psychological issues?

4. To preach with the Hip Hop imagination does not require one to be a fan of Hip Hop.
5. Preaching with the Hip Hop imagination is also appreciated by older congregants just as traditional deductive sermons can be and are often appreciated by younger congregants.

When these guidelines are followed it is highly possible to draw in a crowd that is often disengaged by the sermonic product in many pulpits. The preacher will be able to say anew . . .

*"I wanna Rock right now and I came to get down
I'm not internationally known,
But I'm known to rock a microphone."
Rob Base and DJ E-Z Rock, It takes two¹*

¹ Rob Base, *It takes two*, 1988. Profile Records.

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